This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

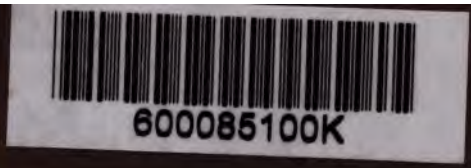
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

MILDRED GOWER


600085100K

MILDRED GOWER.

MILDRED GOWER.

And other Poems.

BY

MARY ROSSITER,

AUTHOR OF

"THE GATHERED LILY," AND OTHER POEMS.

London:

PROVOST AND CO.,

36, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

MDCCCLXXV.

280. n. 789.

UNWIN BROTHERS, PRINTERS BY WATER POWER.

PREFACE.

It is but fair to my readers and myself to state that the following Poem was written in 1866, and therefore seven years before the publication of my last book, and even prior to the writing of many of the poems it contains; that "Mildred Gower" was simply an outlet to thoughts called up by subjects discussed, and incidents known, heard of, or purely imaginary; that it was slipped into a framework very carelessly seized upon; and that subjecting it to any other eye than my own was the last thing I thought of, till accident gained it the notice of a severe critic, who strongly urged its revision and publication, as a *first volume.* The

latter part of his advice I did not take, issuing a book last year, and the construction of the poem is such, that a great revision was hopeless: an incident added, a page rewritten, and some passages strengthened, is all I have done.

M. R.

CONTENTS.

ERRATA.

Page 1, line 15, after last word insert a semicolon.
,, 28 ,, 3, for 'Dawn' read 'Down.'
,, 46 ,, 2, for 'always' read 'alway.'
,, 50 ,, 6, for 'unscath'd' read 'unscathed.'
,, 54 ,, 5, for 'makes' read 'make.'
,, 59 ,, 14, for 'There is' read 'There's.'
,, 61 ,, 22, for 'chase' read 'Chase.'
,, 95 ,, 5, for 'slim' read 'dim.'
,, 103 ,, 4, for 'sometimes' read 'sometime.'
,, 118 ,, 11, for 'will' read 'wild.'
,, 144 ,, 2, for 'opened-eyed' read 'open-eyed.'
,, 167 ,, 13, for 'Is' read 'Its.'
,, 168 ,, 7, for 'veil' read 'veils.'
,, 173 ,, 6, for 'weakens' read 'wakens.'
,, 200 ,, 19, for 'pal'd' read 'paled.'
,, 204 ,, 14, for 'Above' read 'Alone.'
,, 248 ,, 17, for 'eye' read 'eyes.'

Mildred Gower.

I.

THE day was waning slowly, as they walk'd,
The Lady Gwendoline and Mildred Gower,
Beneath th' umbrageous foliage of the oaks
That belt the spacious park. The setting sun
Cast o'er the Lady's forehead such a glow
As blushing beauty wears; and round her head—
Whence meekly fell the smooth, soft, silv'ry braids—
Hover'd a halo; and again the sun,
Dash'd all the sombre sable of her robes
With waves of liquid gold; till presently
It needed not much effort to suppose
This gentle lady some long-worshipp'd saint,
Come back to bless our eyes, and warm our hearts
The golden mist of light she walk'd in, seem'd
The type of God's sweet love encircling her.
They had been parted many years, and now,
This was their first-glad meeting; she, who gave
So lavishly, unask'd and undeserved,

More than a mother's love; and she who took,
And still drew on the undiminish'd store,
And—well! how could she prize it to the full
Not having spann'd its measure? Long they walk'd
And, as the case is often, glanced, and touch'd
On any subject but the themes which lay
The deepest in their hearts; and question'd quick
Of every-day frivolities, till fell
At last a hush upon them, broken up
By Lady Gwendoline's low plaintive voice—
"Dear Mildred! some one listening, would think
We two were casual gossips; yet I wish,
In spite of seeming, much to hear the tale
Which must be woven in and out the years
In which we two were parted. Tell it me!
What is the meaning of the mystery
Which haunts your eyes, and lingers round your mouth;
Shadows your brow, and, like a twilight mist,
Draws sadden'd tenderness about your face,
Veiling its sometime brightness? Well you know
How, in the sacred land of Palestine,
I linger'd years, when going but for months;
How afterwards, in France down-struck I lay,
For weary weeks enfeebled; after that,

Affliction held me there against my will,
Till well-nigh broken-hearted: now alone,
Bereft of husband; brother; children; all;
I look to you, to stay my feeble steps
Till gentle death shall take me. Tell me child!
Of all your hopes and fears; nay! tell me facts;
Your father, mother, aunt; where are they? say!
What has befallen you? no tidings came
Through all these weary years; I have not heard
One word, to be relied on truly, of you all."
To which then Mildred answered—"Spare me now
So much, so manifold, the crowding scenes
Come hurrying o'er my mem'ry: it were best
To write all down, and bid you calmly read
The history my lips refuse to tell."
"Well let it be!" she answered, "as you say;
Meantime, the shades are deep'ning; let us in!"
Then guiding still her wav'ring steps with care,
Mildred led onward, o'er the velvet lawn,
And up the terrace-flats and thro' the hall,
The Lady Gwendoline to rest at peace
Within her shaded boudoir; presently
The gentle slumber of the aged fell
Upon her heavy eyelids, and she slept,

While Mildred dreamily, with drooping head,
Sat watching the long streaks of red and gold,
That barr'd the casements of the West, whence day
Had gazed its last and flown : and silently,
The petals of a full-blown, white moss rose,
Fell one by one, between her and the sky,
From a fair plant around the window twined,
Seeming to symbolize the very thought
Then flitting thro' her brain—that all her hopes,
Fair in their budding, beautiful in growth,
Had fall'n, and perish'd in their very prime.
And then she drew a table close and wrote,
And many a day long after that she wrote ;
While lines and pages multiplied by scenes
Mem'ry brought back unfaded, till the task
Was done, when lo a book ! and this is it !

TO LADY GWENDOLINE.

OURS is no common tie; long years ago
We met, you know, as daily many meet;
You in your rich maturity, and I,
A strangely wilful, happy little maid,
Running as wild within my father's house
As the wild woodbine in untrodden woods;
Unkept, uncheck'd, according to the rules
Which whisp'ring wives, and gossiping old maids,
Brought for my sure correction; yet unknown,
Obeying strictly the once-given command
Of the Great Master, who, in wisdom deep,
Leaves still within His garden wild-grown vines,
To climb awhile unpruned, and throw their showers
Of tangled wreaths o'er trim-kept, fruitful plants.
Unlike as possible, it seem'd, we two

Met there by so-call'd chance; when lady, you,
Gazing upon me—all your face aglow
With tenderness—did draw my heart to yours,
As the warm sun draws up the dew from flowers;
And thenceforth none could part our souls, they clung
Together, as two raindrops resting lone
On the same leaf, together cling, when comes
An impetus which sets them sliding down
The self-same vein; and never more can aught
Divide them as they were; a something lost,
Or gain'd, each from the other, the effect
Of their once unity, should any strive
To force the two thus perfected, apart.
Long years you strove with strong, persistent care,
To mould me to the model-child you saw
Somewhere in fair ideal. Your patient love
Knew neither doubt, nor hint of failure; firm
In the strong purpose to implant all good,
And so crowd out all evil, you went on
Day after day unwearied, training back
My rambling fancies; overgrown conceits;
Weak musings; wilful ways; just as you smooth'd
The creases from my tumbled frock, and brush'd
My tangled elf-locks: but, alas! for love

And care bestow'd so fondly ; fancies, freaks,
Wild musings, day-dreams, creases, tangled locks,
Came all again, and—lady ! still they come !
Oft have I seen your eager, hopeful glance,
Die out in shade, as my weak efforts fail'd
In doing what your heart was set upon ;
Or glow to radiancy, as in glad pride
I show'd some weird, eccentric thing, I named
A picture, poem, or what not, complete.
Oh ! those were days of happiness, for hope
Did o'er mine eyes a rainbow-fillet bind,
And through it all show'd fair. Then too my soul,
First wandering apart, fell weak and low
Upon the threshold of art's temple ; faint
With passionate desire, and yearning sore
To enter ; yet not daring to uplift
Her voice to ask of any votary,
"For gentle pity's sake, lead thou me in !"
Oh, lady dear ! you never could have guess'd
The visions, and the dreams, that chasing each
The other through my childish brain, did make
A world within, where wandering alone,
My spirit drank in streams of quick'ning life,
From founts not earth-drain'd. You might strongly urge

The use of needle deftly plied, and set
The homely garment for repair, and watch
My awkward hands work on it; but the while
My thoughts were soaring mid rose-tinted clouds;
Climbing the rainbow-paths that wind between;
Or building airy castles. Happy days!
Happy amidst a thousand little ills!
For, sweet, bright dreams swept thro' my slumb'ring hours,
And when I woke, 'twas but to chase some gaud,
Which did, or did not, prove to be all gold,
Yet pleased alike in chasing just the same;
For, children blindly, men clear-eyed, both find
That happiness consists—at least for time—
Most surely in pursuit; not in the gain
Of that pursued, satiety comes then.
Yes! those were happy days, for I athirst,
Could kneel low down in sweet humility,
And at the open well of knowledge drink
And slake my parching thirst, and feel the draught
Sink deep into my being, there to feed
And nourish thoughts, and feelings, some far day
To yield their fruits. Oh! then I walk'd so close
To heaven's bright gates, that I could hear the sound

Of its entrancing harmony within
And essay'd to interpret it; and though
So feebly done, so brokenly, who knows!
But 'twas an echo of the heavenly choir
More true in tone, than after-chords struck out
So daringly, with full-grown strength, and pride
In earthly lore and knowledge: for—from men
Oft wisdom hath been hidden, while to babes
It was reveal'd: nor wonder we at this,
Knowing how lately their bright souls have been
Sent forth from heaven: why should not its light
Linger around them fondly? How can they
Fail to bring with them something of the hues
Which make heaven fair, since they are angel-sped.
I soar'd so high then, I could catch a glimpse
Of blinding glory from heaven's pearly gates:
Soar'd up so high? Nay! rather crouch'd so low,
That pitying angels lifted me to see
What proud souls never can.
Oh, wondrous music! fainter every day
Grew your sweet numbers to my list'ning ear!
Oh, golden glory! paler year by year
Waned the bright glow; for farther, farther still,
I've wander'd, like a stray sheep from the fold.

Oh, days of wondering! for then I held
Close converse with my heart, and learn'd to look
Within for revelations day by day,
As circumstance and feeling laid them bare.
So, winds and sun, fold daily from the bud
The tender petals backward, till behold!
A full-blown flow'r. This was my inner life,
During that time when you, my monitress,
Did labour carefully to plant in me
The principles of knowledge: building walls
On which uprose hereafter in my mind
The structure as you find it: look at it!
'Tis poor at best from ev'ry point of view;
Yet not without its use; and though its form
Be rough and strange, 'tis builded on a rock;
And still is mounting upward, stone by stone;
Till afterwards the superstructure too,
Shall be built on in heaven; and spires and domes,
Lost here in clouds and mist, shall show there clear
Against the pure white light; and costly gems
Shall stud its windows round; and all its doors
Shall diamonds encrust, flashing out light;
Fair turrets—jewell'd too—shall garnish it;
And none shall call it paltry then, or mean;

Because the Eternal Architect will deign
To call it "Good."—Thus lady! years sped by,
And brought a day which sever'd us; you went
To Palestine, and I, thenceforth to take
My dwelling up in Dean's old forest-depths;
Watch'd over by a tender mother's care,
And no less loving father. Yet a child,
Amidst whose locks ten springs had wreathed their buds,
Ten summer-suns call'd roses to fair cheeks
And kissed to life the dimples round the mouth:
I knew no care, nor counted how time flew,
Save by the seeds spring-sown, which first grew up
As leafy plants; then budded, and then burst
Into full-beautied bloom. The simple folk
Round our new home, a kindly welcome gave
When first we went among them; buxom dames
Offer'd their sage advice; strong vig'rous youths
Their ready help; and maidens, of wild grace,
Came tripping merrily with fruits and flowers;
And rough, but kindly-hearted, hale old men
Toned down their voices—ringing with a sound
Caught from the iron they smote at—asking God
To bless to them our coming. It was spring
When first we went among them; bounteous May

Had early risen that year, and flung abroad,
In prodigal profusion, all the wealth
Of her o'er-teeming bosom. I, from streets,
Long stately streets, and almost city-bred,
Went wild with joy to find myself set down
Amid such full luxuriance; to be
In scenes like these, such only as in dreams
My fancy revell'd through. Now, every day
The out-spread forest was a banquet-hall,
Where, lingering, my senses still could feast
Nor ever know satiety. Afar
In the wild forest-glades to wander on,—
The air all music, and the earth all flowers—
Oh! this was rapture! Through dim, solemn aisles,
Where slender shafts, whence sprang the perfect arch,
Rose one beyond the other, on and on,
Till lost in far perspective, those but seem'd
The shadow'd image of these others near;
The green, cool shade beneath them, broken up
At noon, by long and arrowy rays of light
Piercing the arch'd leaf-roof; and later yet,
When eve drew on, the golden light would pour
Through the low distant archway, in a tide
Of molten glory, down, through half the aisle;

Where paled, and soften'd, it would melt, and die
In tenderness and beauty, calmly out,
Lapp'd on the lilies drooping meekly there.
Here I might roam alone, and hear no sound
Save waters' ceaseless harmonies; the hum
Of wingèd insects, from the drowsy bee
Sated with sweets, down to the shrilling gnat;
The low, delicious babble of small founts,
Welling up slowly from the mossy stones,
And, like true charity, unseen of men,
Gliding on quietly beneath the shade,
To nourish and refresh the faint and weak;
The song of birds, of all earth's melodies
The one, full, perfected and constant type
Of joy, unsullied joy; the sighing wind,
In all its varied cadences, from vows
Breathed to the pale blue-bell, up to the roar
With which it thunders on the forest trees,
As on a mighty harp; the rustling sound
Of falling leaf on leaf; the liquid flash
Of summer showers among the leaves above;
No sounds but these, and everywhere, the eye
Fill'd with true beauty, fresh from God's own hand,
And fragrant with His love. These forest aisles

Dim, and uncertain, dreamy, suited best
My then half-slumb'ring soul; in later days
I loved them less; they seem'd to stifle me,
They weigh'd me down; they penn'd my spirit in;
It could not soar: I wander'd then beyond,
Left field and vale, and mounting upward, threw
Myself at length upon the brown, burnt grass,
Or scrubby heath, which crown'd the Beacon-hill,
With nothing 'twixt me and the far-off sky
But glory-broider'd clouds. There I felt free;
Free to soar up, upon my spirit's wing,
And revel in my freedom. But not yet
I wearied of those aisles, where wandering
And singing as I wander'd all alone,
Such thoughts as fill'd my heart came warbling out
In rude, untutor'd rhyme. And so it fell
That, underneath the forest-trees, I grew
To be a wild-wood songstress; nature's voice
Attuned my own; her flow'ry language, traced
In symbols everywhere, seem'd easy task
To be interpreted by one, who lay
Prostrate and wrapt before her; eagerly
Drinking, unquestioning, her wisdom in
When given amid the withering, flashing light,

Or frowning clouds; alike, alike to me;
I thirsted, drank, and rose again refresh'd;
Went to my home with music ling'ring round
My happy soul, which gather'd of all sweets,
As all my robes had gather'd up perfume
In trailing through the woods; and as my feet
Were yellow with the golden dust of flowers
From sunny meads; Ay! as my tumbled hair
Was sweet with fragrance from the wild-thyme beds,
Where I had lain in day-dreams.
Unheeding song's bright gift I warbled on;
Just as a fount unseal'd in grassy plains
Goes murmuring: I sang of flowers and birds;
Of sun and skies; of fairy sylvan scenes;
And praised as perfect bliss the past'ral life;
Nor mingled with it all one word of grief,
Because my songs were, like the sky-lark's best,
Pour'd forth in soaring upward. Happy songs!
Given forth of full exuberance of joy,
With which my heart o'er-flowed; sung thus
They made the woodman poise his upraised axe—
And weary of its weight o'er and again,
Before he let it fall—while listening:
They won the children from their happy play,

And held them near, half-shyly peeping out
From interlacing branches ; yes ! and made
The rough pit-man returning to the light,
From delving gnome-like, step close up and list
With wondering surprise, and brush the tears
Slowly aside, with rough though honest hand ;
Then hasten on, with tender streams of love
Loosed from his heart, to gladden anxious eyes
That many a time 'neath shading hand had turn'd
To scan the winding way. So singing thus,
And wandering with nature hand in hand,
Time flitted by ; and softly though he touch'd
With his white pinions my uplifted brow,
He still brush'd off a something from the glow
Of circling joylight there. Then, day by day,
I slowly now was gaining what the world
Calls knowledge ; so that, very gradually,
As weeks and months went gently stealing on,
Things wore for me more truthful forms and hues ;
And I began to look behind what seem'd,
And read what was ; then bitter was the pang
Bringing conviction. Let the worldling sneer,
And stamp as sickly twaddle thoughts like these,
But, 'tis a cruel ordeal for pure hearts

That passing from the simple, childish faith
In others' truth, to distrust, and to doubt;
Or simply to discernment of deceit.
True! it must be; no matter howe'er slow
The process is; or if some glaring light
Shows all at once most clearly, what before
Was dreamy and uncertain; and henceforth
Unbounded faith in man goes slowly out,
And worldly wisdom, cold suspicion, comes
To take its place. The poet once did say—
"If ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."
"If ignorance is bliss"—Look at the child,
In utter ignorance of all the ills
That close him round; in utter ignorance
Of everything, and mostly of that life
Which yet he bears; and of the journey set
Before him, which so blindly he must needs
Begin and end. Behold him! How he takes
The hand steep'd red in blood, and fondles it
As lovingly, as though 'twere pure and white
As his own dimpled one: he pouts his lip
To kiss his murd'rer; clasps his chubby arms
About his neck, and dallies with the knife
So soon to drain his life. Or wand'ring wild

In flow'ry meads—when all the grass is thick
With blue-bells chiming in the wind—he sees
The shining snake glide by, or adder dart
Its forkèd tongue, and laughing in his glee,
Calls to the "pretty things" to wait for him;
Nor doubts, nor fears, because both doubt and fear
Are born of knowledge; he is ignorant.
What then! What then? Ah! wise it is, and well,
That infant eyes should slowly open out
To truth's full glaring noon. We cannot go
Always as infants, trailing to the skirts
Of others, but must learn to see, and know,
And walk alone, and judge, and choose aright
For our ownselves. Yes! though the power comes
With pain and sorrow, trials, that crush out
The freshness from the heart as hail-stones beat
The young and tender beauty from the flower.
But afterwards we rise, and gather up
The new-found strength, and power, and we feel
That henceforth childhood, and its ignorance,
—In which *was* bliss—have pass'd away from us;
And we have gain'd instead, the wariness,
And penetration, which shall evermore
Uplift the mask from things that show so fair,

And look behind, to see them as they are,
Ere we believe. And are we happier?
Ah! there it is! does knowledge as it is,
Here in this world—no matter of what kind—
Bring happiness? The plough-boy whistles on
His toiling team, unconscious of the whole
Wide universe: dim brain! dim heart! dim soul!
Blind to the beauties of this world, nor knows
If sun and moon be coals of fire or worlds;
Or he himself philosopher or fool.
And he is happy; doubt it not! for he
Has health, and food enough, and raiment too;
And this, why this is all a mortal needs,
Till he has tasted of that fatal fruit
The tree of knowledge yields; alas! and then
Comes back the question—Does then knowledge bring
To mortals happiness? Stay here! let us think
What part of man does knowledge most affect.
His mind, his intellect; well! then, can man,
Having his mind well fed, and cared for, be
—Provided he hath all the common wants
The body needs supplied—a happy man?
What! with a starving soul, and pining heart,
Fill'd with unutt'rable, unceasing cries

For nourishment, and comfort? Never! no!
The man of intellect may be with that
No better than a demon; tormenting
To others, and an everlasting curse
To his own self; begetting hideous thoughts
Of pride, which, like the wingèd seeds of plants,
He sends forth floating on the breath of fame,
To rest and quicken in the broad world-fields,
And bring forth of their kind, rank, poisonous growth.
But he—the man who gives his pow'rful mind
To careful culture, turning up its soil,
So that the sun of truth may ripen germs
Of goodly seed, such as shall, presently,
Put forth the strong and wholesome nourishment
Of many craving it; who carefully
Doth tend his heart, that all the lovely flowers
And fruit may bloom and ripen there, and weeds
Die slowly out—shall climb to happiness.
For, mark you well! ere he can do all this,
He must have given his soul, man's noblest part,
To God to teach; and of such teaching comes
The only kind of knowledge that can e'er
Stop all the cravings of our inner life,
And then we may be happy.

II.

It was a fair June eve. The forest trees
Were thick with leaves, and up and down the aisles,
The hawthorn bushes, drap'd in milk-white bloom,
Stood meekly, like veil'd nuns at vesper hour.
The ruddy sun at setting cast a glance
Athwart their colourless, cold purity,
And warm'd it to life-beauty: stillness round,
Themselves all harmony, for in their hearts
Housed welcome choirs of merry-singing birds,
Now to the waning daylight pouring forth
Their prayerful chorus. I had lingered on,
Unheeding time, beneath a shelt'ring thorn
That grew high up 'mid shelving rocks, moss-grown,
Whence fell a stream, with drowsy, plashing sound,
Into the vale below, and, snakelike, wound
Beneath the waving grass and low-bent ferns.
Here, perched aloft upon a rustic throne,
I sat, half-hidden by the drooping boughs,

With all the show'r of May-blooms sprinkled o'er,
And perfumed with their sweets, interpreting
The waterfall's wild song, as blended with
The fox-glove's fancied chimes. Thus hours had pass'd,
I all unheeding, when came suddenly
A deep-toned voice that roused me. Looking down,
I saw, amid the rampant bracken-fern,
A stranger standing; tall and very grave,
With dark, deep eyes, he seem'd to be. He bow'd,
And said—a slight smile breaking up the gloom
Which veil'd his face—"Are you the fairy queen
I see up there? If so, please to direct
Your humble servant from this labyrinth.
Which of these many glades will lead again
Out to the high road yonder? Wand'ring on,
I just now lost my way." I hastily
Uprose, and letting fall the wild-flower wreath
I half-unconsciously had twined, turn'd round
To leave my mossy throne; when, blushing deep,
And trembling, half with wrath and half with shame,
To have my dear romance thus laugh'd at, lost
My usual courage, and in climbing down
My foot slipp'd, and I fell. Nor knew I more,
Till, waking up to sense of pain, I found

Myself, all faint, upon the greensward laid,
And the tall stranger kneeling by me there,
Soft'ning his deep voice down to tender tones,
Soothing my fear. "Dear little one," he said,
"You had a fall; we must be very glad
It was no worse. See! how your bluebell crown
Is torn, and floating by upon the stream;
And high, high up waves still your wild-flower wreath,
While you are safe down here. But, what is this?"
He ask'd, alarm'd, as vainly I had tried
To raise myself to stand. "Ah!" with a start,
"The ankle! Well, now little fairy queen,
Just fancy me your slave, and bid me go
Where'er you will." Then, with the tenderness
Of noble natures unto weak ones, stoop'd
And took my trembling form up in his arms
And lightly, as he might have borne a flow'r
Upon his breast, he bore me all along
Through the far glades, now deep'ning into gloom;
There, once we came upon a mighty herd
Of tall, red deer, which, startled at his tread,
Rush'd past us, like a mountain torrent, far
Into the forest-depths. We cross'd the moor
Where there was nothing but the prickly gorse,

Like a gold ring encircling it about,
And flashing here and there, with amethysts
The heath and wild-thyme made; and all along
He soothed me kindly; closely folded round
My crumpled, tatter'd drap'ry; for with eve
The light breeze freshen'd. Once, I looking up,
In a brief interval of vexing pain,
Encounter'd the full depths of his dark eye,
And gazed admiring; as I often gazed
At some one golden star, set deep within
The purple ocean of a summer sky.
'Twas thus we reach'd my home, where carefully
He placed his burden on my mother's lap
And briefly told his story. Rack'd with pain
I closed my eyes and moan'd. "She is a child
Of more than common character," he said,
As gracefully accepting for the night
My father's hospitality, he fell
Into free converse, while with loving care
My mother tended me. The stranger gave
His name as Oscar Vivian; and said,
He had been tempted by the loveliness
Of forest scenery, on a walking tour;
That on the morrow friends awaited him

At Ross ; and here they hurried me away ;
But not before he very gravely put
My hot and tangled curls aside, and look'd
On my flush'd forehead musingly ; and said,
Half to himself, " There should be something here
If Lavater is true ; a something doom'd
One day to make her famous : granted that
The discipline and training both be good."
Then as my eye met his inquiringly,
He smiled and held his hand, and said aloud,
" Farewell ! my fairy queen ! dream on ! and sing !
Amidst your trees and flowers ; but never come
Out into all the noise and hollowness
Of the great world beyond. Dream on ! and sing !
And may you grow up good and innocent !
True to yourself and others. Pardon now,
Before I leave, the pain and weariness
I all unwillingly have caused, and soon
May you be wandering again, restored,
Away by streams and founts !" Peculiar,
And unlike to all other men, I thought
This stranger ; but I gave my hand and smiled,
As well as pain would let me, and forgave
The unwill'd hurt ; then said good-night ! and

And after that we met no more; he left
Next morning ere the dew from forest flowers
Was brush'd by birds' upspringing. I was kept
For many weeks, a restive prisoner,
With my wrench'd ankle; all my prison house
Made fair by loving hands, and loving thought;
For books, and birds, and music; fairy-tales,
And wondrous pictures, gladden'd my dear home;
And village maidens rifled dell and wood,
For wreaths and wild flow'rs; day by day brought fresh
To garland, and make bright my little room.
Sickness and suffering, in childhood tend
To deepen thought, and quicken intellect:
The body doom'd to rest, the mind wins power
For active, eager scrutiny; and themes
Distant from healthful, happy little hearts,
Crept into mine; and my old fancies took
Ten times more force within my busy brain.
But ever in my sleep, and waking dreams;
And often in my converse with the flowers;
And ever as I yearn'd towards the sky,
Through the deep hush of sunset's solemn hour,
I saw again the stranger's down-bent eyes
Gaze into mine, as when he bore me through

The forest glades; I tried to sound their depths;
Fathom their meaning; guess what secret grief
Had given them such strange beauty; ponder'd oft
His words at parting: wanting to ask much
I long'd yet fear'd to question on; made tales
Of which he was the hero, doing deeds
Such as the heroes of old history
Delighted in to do. Thus he became
A standard of all excellence, to which
I brought thoughts, words, and acts for measuring;
So what pass'd there was good, and what fail'd there
Was evermore condemn'd. Unknowingly
Thus did the ideal, and the real, become
So blended and entwined, so garb'd and deck'd;
So halo'd with romance, that, both as one
They henceforth showed; a type for following,
Revered as perfect. Well! my spirit grew,
And rustled strengthen'd pinions: in my soul
Strange throes made felt their anguish; genius woke
To its first state of being, and began
The struggle, and contending for full life,
Which still went on throughout the long-drawn years:
Not fiercely now, but firmly, seeing clear
Far on ahead the victory. It uproused

All slumb'ring feelings; broke strong passion's rest;
Marshall'd thought's scatter'd forces; dash'd the high
Dawn into depths of darkness; set mid light
The meek and lowly; all the gentle plains
Of holy calm were torn asunder, rent,
Fused into blacken'd seas to swell the tide
Of seething lava-oceans: mist and gloom,
Wrapp'd fold on fold around it, broider'd by
Fierce lightnings' lurid flashes; thunder peals
Startled the trembling silence; turmoil; night,
Encompassing the soul; affright and dread
Out of the strangeness grew; then genius came
Swooping down mid the gloom, fain now to fold
His wings, and brood upon the troubled mass,
Till out of the conglomeration rose
Art's pristine attribute—rough form.

III.

FIERCE came the thirst for knowledge; day by day
I search'd the musty tomes that scantly lined
My father's study; went and wearied him
With thousand questions; set myself hard tasks,
Nor rested till I finish'd them; crept close
And listen'd eagerly to themes discuss'd
By my dear father and our pastor, held
Beneath the little jasmine-bow'r, that stood
Within the Rectory gardens. Good old man
Our pastor was; a lone, and childless man,
Whose sympathies, untrammell'd thus, went out,
Embracing, blending with, and circling round
His scatter'd flock; and widen'd readily
To wretchedness wherever found. He lived
But to do good and holy deeds, and stood
As Christ's own minister among His poor;
Nor heeding of the world outside his bounds;
Nor caring tho' it ceased to think of him,

Content to live, forgetting and forgot
By all except his Master and His fold.
A man so strangely childlike in his faith,
So mighty in its exercise; so wise
To win the lost and erring from their ways;
So courteous, tender, merciful: well-skill'd
In classic lore; and learned as refined.
He was my counsellor, and carefully
The good old man would lead my wilful mind
To holy lessons, meekly to be learn'd
For health of soul and body. By degrees
The wish to know if what I wrote and sung,
Were such as others, out afar might care
To read and garner up: if I should grow
To that my spirit hinted at; if what
I long'd for, was before me—made me shake
My native shyness off, and boldly ask
This wise good man to tell me. There is not
One portion of the landscape seen high up
From mountain tops, that is not wonderful;
For all is perfect in its fair design,
And fitted for its uses: yet the eye
Notes in first glance, some few outstanding points
Of boldest beauty. So in looking back

Upon our lives, the whole is marvellous
In its grand plan; yet some events stand clear
In keen relief upon the far-off, broad
And darker back-ground; and we note them first;
With those too tow'ring up so dark and grim,
Throwing their blackness close against the sky
In threat'ning shapes. I, looking all along
My line of life, glance at these many points,
And pause before the first. A misty day,
When sky and earth alike, and air, and sea;
And my wild heart too, all, were cold and grey;
For all the chilling shadows, that creep round
The feeble dying year, seem'd on that day
To steal into my heart, and froze up there
Its tide of happiness, and clouded out
Its sunshine and its joylight. All alone
I sat and brooded in the little room
I call'd my study. Very, very sad
Was all outside, and still. The trees held up
Their wizen figures and their shrunken limbs;
The trailing vines, and plants around the walls,
Were loosen'd from their hold, and rotting lay,
Low-trampled in the earth. A half-starved bird
Flew now and then in hurried silence by.

Wide-streaming, careless, o'er the window-panes
The leafless, sapless, woodbine branches hung.
Within, the fire burnt dull; the soot-flake flapp'd
Upon the dusty bar; red ashes pour'd
Silently out, spending the vital heat,
And crumbling cinders, in their hurried fall,
Beat out a flutt'ring death-pulse. Creeping shades
Rose gaunt and weird on ceiling, floor, and wall;
Nodding and mocking slowly. Lone I sat,
Listlessly pondering upon my own
Deep mystery of being; felt that I grew
Still to myself a riddle, day by day
More difficult of solving; wondering too
If in the lock'd recesses of all hearts
Such yearnings hid; if in the cavern'd depths
Of every brain such burning thoughts made bright
The brooding gloom, and lamp'd the frowning shade
Away down spanning arches. Some dim thought
That what one mortal is in heart and soul
All others are, so far as sympathy
At least makes unity; that what one is
Another has been, is, and shall be, through
All time, past and to come; dim hints that man,
As man, is ever much the same, and so

Is govern'd, guided, and appeal'd to through
The self-same pow'rs of intellect—came then,
First dawning o'er my mind, if so, wise men—
Men skill'd in reading from the written past,
And from their own wide intercourse with men,
The why and wherefore of great deeds, the springs
And actions of the mind, the power and weight
In characters far famous—quick could solve
The little riddle I should be to them:
No riddle after all, but clear to read
As any child's book writ in black and white.
Thus did I reason, and rose up resolved.
Our dear old pastor, he was wise and good,
And he would tell me all. I ran, I flew,
And breaking in upon him where he sat
In calm and pensive meditation, thrust
A roll of writings in his trembling hands,
And, full of doubts and fears, entreated him
To read and judge their merits. Smiling then,
With that slow smile which lights the face of age,
He very calmly took them, spread them out,
Rustled the crumpled papers o'er and o'er,
Wiped his blurr'd spectacles, and placed them on,
Leant back, clear'd up his throat, then read and mused;

I all the time half frantic. I had flung
My hat and cloak aside, and trembling sank
Upon my usual seat, the yielding rug;
And now my head bent low, I hid my face,
My hot, flushed face, within my restless hands,
And waited, as a criminal might wait,
For the deciding sentence; wondering
How I had dared to come there.
A weary while it was, that waiting time;
I neither spoke nor moved; the clear-voiced clock
Tick'd ne'er before so oft; the sleek old cat,
My playmate many an hour, ne'er purr'd before
So noisily and harshly. Round my head
A half-numb'd fly, roused into transient life
By indoor warmth, droned drowsily, and woke
By its persistency my pettish wrath.
My nerves were all ajar, and my flesh crept
With irritable nervousness kept close
And hinder'd outward showing. Low I crouch'd,
Numbering o'er and o'er again the flowers
Bright glowing on the carpet; "Twelve this way,
And twelve that way," I murmur'd, and again
Began the rapid counting, as if life
Depended on it, till I felt a hand

Press gently on my head, and, "Child, look up!"
Came softly to my ear. I rose at that,
And, half assured, cried out, "O tell me all!
I am not half so weak as I appear;
I will abide by what you say; I will!
Yes, though you should condemn." He smiled again,
And wistfully scann'd anxiously my face
As though he ne'er had look'd at it before.
"Peace, little one!" said he, "I know you well!
The spirit truly waxes wondrous strong!
And shall some day accomplish all it wills.
But listen! listen patiently awhile!
To what an old man says." "Oh! stay!" I cried,
"You give me hope already; I am glad!
The pain I felt so heavy at my heart
Is well nigh gone; for oh sir! wearily
These few hours past I've pondered over much
That crowds my inner life; and oh! I doubt
What once I trusted in; I doubt my power;
I doubt, nor know if melody I make
Or discord; if my rhymes be jargon, fit
Only for my own reading; oh! I doubt
The promise in them of the smallest good
In the far future; yea! I doubt! I doubt!

If 'tis to be desired, though it be mine,
This gift of genius; is it any good?
Will it bring happiness? it brings none now,
As heretofore: it troubles me, I think
That after all I am deceived perhaps,
And what I thought was inspiration nought
But cold, cold breathings of my own; I loathe
These very rhymes I bring you; I could tear
And burn them with quick gladness, every one,
And never write again; at least, this seems
My pleasure now!" "Poor child!" he said, "poor child,
And it is come to this? The glorious gift
You revell'd in till now, scarce heeding it,
You think at last a fatal gift, or nought.
Lift up your heart to heaven, and ask for grace
To guide this glorious gift of genius right;
For mark you, child! you have it evermore
For good or evil; it is yours, as sure
As that the light makes day, or darkness night;
And none may rob you of it; nor may you
In craven cowardice, or fainting strength,
Shuffle its duties off. It is a gift
Both beautiful and fearful; a bright spark

Of God's own giving, burning in a shrine
Of earth, to light lone wanderers thro' the dark;
And woe to him who dares extinguish it!
And woe to him who feedeth not the flame!
But three times cursed shall he be, who sets
The precious light aloft before false gods,
So that the simple passers-by go in,
And fall down dazed and worship. There is not
In hell, depths deep enough for such an one,
Yet shall he find hell deepest in his heart,
When heaven's best Sun shall rise and show him clear
All he has lost and gain'd. Dear child! full oft
I've pillow'd tenderly your golden head
Upon my breast; and love you passing well,
But rather would I lay it down to rest,
With all its wealth of curls among the clay,
Than see you mocking at God's precious gifts
By wilfully perverting them. He asks
A just return. I am an old man now
And very near the grave; but long ago
I had a friend, perhaps more than a friend,
And, just as you have done, she woke to find
Herself a genius; no one guided her,
But like a glorious star she mounted up,

Leaving a trail of light to mark her path
On to the zenith; there, set high, and fair,
A glitt'ring orb, amidst a galaxy
Of others, far less fair, she did forget
She still was human; leant on her own strength;
Vaunted herself of worth; dared dang'rous deeds;
And pride, which hurl'd the morning star down low,
Did like with her; the heavens are yet as bright,
Tho' her star set in darkness, for she fell.
What then? the depths have hidden her. But stay!
I fright you little one! dry up those tears!
And let us talk awhile. These lays of yours
Are fairly well for you; but still I say
Write no more for awhile, but read, and learn
Strong useful lessons; study the best works
Of our best poets; con them long and well;
So shall they strengthen, and correct your taste.
Nor these alone, but whatsoe'er of good
Comes in your way; read what our Jonson says
The education of a poet is,
Then act it out yourself. You know, my child!
Sugar is good to sweeten stronger food;
But when devour'd unmix'd can satiate
E'en baby tastes; and child! the honey-dew

Which heaven hath hitherto rain'd down so thick
Upon your opening heart, still reappears
In all these wild wood-songs, till verily,
They melt upon the lips that utter them
And leave but cloying sweetness: wait awhile!
Till suffering, and sorrow; spirit-throes—
Borne patiently or wrestled with—till storms
Of passion conquer'd; inward foes subdued;
Shall leave you calmly strong, then you may write;
For, having learn'd yourself by discipline,
Harsh howsoe'er it be, and having fought,
And gather'd strength and wisdom—write, then write!
And 'twill be wholesome; not, mind you! all sweet,
Nor bitter all, but haply blending both
In true proportion, fit for nourishment
Of full-grown strength."
I winced a little, but I doubted not
The good old man spoke truth, and listen'd long
That wintry day, while still he counsell'd me;
And then, as daylight faded, felt his hands
In blessing press my head, and presently
I left, and homeward went resolved. Next day,
At grey and misty dawn, I rose and wrote,
In glowing letters on my study wall—

" Will'd well is half fulfill'd," and gradually
The mist clear'd up, and first a tender ray
Of sunlight kiss'd the words; but afterwards
They danced and whirled, in all the heat and blaze
Of full-timed noon.

IV.

So years sped past: I was a child no more;
But a slight maiden, wondering, with wide eyes,
At all the mummery I met with, when
I stray'd beyond my home. Why all the strong
Together clung, and trampled down the weak;
Wherefore the proud, with swelling words, and high,
Look'd down with scorn upon the humble souls;
And why the rich man, hugging his big purse,
Did strut and swagger so, above the poor:
And why the miser gloated o'er his gold:
And why the drunkard drank and grovell'd so.
I marvell'd o'er this mystery—why sin
Is left, like some big, over-fed brute-beast,
To trample on through this fair world of ours,
Tearing his prey, and sating himself on
The reeking corpses—guessing not at half,
Nay! not a hundredth part, of all that guilt
Which darkens the fair earth. Great God and just!

How canst Thou, in thy purity, look down
Upon it all and yet forbear to strike
The blow of vengeance? For, Thine Eye must see
Rivers of blood, stream thro' earth, to blood-seas,
Drain'd out of mangled forms and murder'd hearts,
Whence upward rise the reeking, ruddy mists,
And, like an atmosphere, enwrap the world.
Foul, foul as every crime can make it now,
It has become. The turmoil and the strife;
The jostling each of each, within its ways
For petty precedence; the anguish cries,
And moans of tortured innocence, make up
Another Babel, which the first doth howl
To silence down. And I, affrighted, wept
To find myself a wanderer, set out
Amid such perils, praying oftentimes,
In ignorance and blindness, helplessly,
The Father merciful, to take me home.
But prayers so weak, so sin-clogg'd, reach not up
Perchance to God's great footstool; or may be
My guardian angel—ever-pitiful—
Delay'd the recording of such, nor went
Till bearing wiser ones. We must become
Daily, by stern experience, alive

To all the joys and grief, that make this life
So bitter-sweet; so sweetly bitter too.
Some joy, perchance, would show itself afar
Upon the dim horizon; I would start
With trembling lips and hands high clasp'd, to watch
It slowly mount and brighten; then some mist
Would dull it, and all passionate in prayer
I would prostrate myself; and when again
It shone out dazzlingly, would rise and gaze
Till my full soul, out-drawn in sympathy,
Went quivering onward thro' the mist and night,
To lose itself in light. But oh! how sad!
To see that joy, when rounded to its full,
And mounting on high upward trailing light
Through all the sky, become a darkness, when
Thick clouds loom'd up and hid it: it was cold
And weary work then, wandering in the dark,
After the eyes had drank in warmth and light:
Chilly it was, without those glowing rays
Of cheering heat; and long before weak eyes
Could grow accustom'd to the change, and see
Enough amid the gloom to stay the feet
From stumbling fatally. Thus far, my life
Had floated onward, as a snowy cloud

Floats through the liquid blue of summer skies:
But now arose a wind which wafted it
Afar mid other scenes; new lights and shades,
Commingling with it, as it journey'd on
Till no more white and fleecy, soft and round,
It show'd against the scene; but barr'd and fleck'd;
Pointed up here, and hollow'd there; sun-dash'd
Its bosom now, and then gloom-dyed, it grew
A varied novelty of what it was.
Thus was the change work'd out. I had an aunt,
My mother's only sister, living far,
Mid scenes of gaiety; a brilliant dame
Shining as leader of a little world
Of pleasure—seeking butterflies, who made
The end and aim of life, its one sole care,
To centre in the surest, swiftest way
Of killing time most pleasantly. My aunt
Had married young, when little but a child,
One old enough to be her grandfather,
Sir Charles Mulgrave; a courtly gentleman,
Who petted her as one would pet a bird,
And drowsily look'd on, half pleased, half vex'd,
At all her wild vagaries; sipp'd his port,
Made jokes, some good, some bad, laugh'd at alike

By flatt'ring guests; ate, feasted on the best;
Grew gouty, corpulent, weak-minded, then
Died as such men must die. My lady aunt,
A fair, young, childless widow, wore her weeds,
Wept tears, that render'd elegantly limp
Some two or three lawn kerchiefs, lived retired
From fashionable gatherings for a year;
And then, more eager than before, launch'd out
Into gay scenes, none the less bright that he,
Whom she had sworn to love and honour, lay
Within the park Mausoleum all unmourn'd.
She danced and flirted, but she kept her wealth,
And liberty; the last so early sold,
Being regain'd held ten times dearer now.
My mother saw her rarely, though at times
Kind letters came to bid us visit her;
While I scarce knew her; only, when a babe
She held me at the font, and duly gave
The usual gift—a silver fork and spoon—
And deem'd her duty done. Sorrow and care
Had made my mother steal away from towns
And live retired, with husband and with child
In this our forest home; and thus removed,
Our intercourse with Lady Mulgrave proved

But slight and fitful. Now, one day in spring,
(And spring always brings time of change to me),
She wrote a lengthy letter, coaxingly
Asking my mother would she let her child
Come on a visit to her; much there was
Of tender longing, thoroughly to know
Her dear godchild of whom but late she heard
Such promises of future good; then came
Hosts of o'erwhelming reasons, urging why
A young girl of seventeen should make the best
Most brilliant début; she was childless too,
And felt most anxious that her sister's child
Should have, at life's first starting-point, full share
Of all her rank and influence. A denial
My mother sent; but father, mother, all
Were coax'd, cajoled, and finally compell'd
By verbal pleading, into saying Yes!
My aunt came posting in her coach and four
And turn'd our country heads. I never yet
Have seen her peer in elegance and ease,
Nor yet her equal in the witching grace
Of conversation; while to me she seem'd
Half sister and half mother; making me,
Perforce, admire and love her, long before

Her brief sojourn with us was fully o'er:
Else had I never left so easily
My own sweet home, and loving ones; e'en then
It cost me many a pang: yet go I did,
Hoping and promising a quick return;
Our pastor's blessing and my father's prayers
Still sounding in mine ears; my mother's kiss
Warm yet upon my lips; her tears still wet
Upon my troubled brow; and all along,
Through bow'ry lanes, the perfume-laden breeze
Sigh'd sweet adieux. A totally new life
Dawn'd on me at my aunt's. Her mansion rose
In perfected Italian style, amidst
The wide, fair park. Within it, all that art
Could do was done, to make it fit abode
For exquisites and belles: a costly resting-place,
Where, wearied with far flittings o'er bright lands,
My aunt might take repose, or gather round
Crowds of gay friends for merriment and joy.
The eye could gaze delighted everywhere;
The most fastidious taste be satisfied.
Form, colouring, and combinations, all
Was simply perfect. Lady Mulgrave watch'd
My words and gestures closely, dreading much

Some shock from one or other to her sense
Of high refinement, and at last remark'd
I only wanted style and toning down.
Ah ! my fair aunt, you labour'd many a day
To make me elegantly languishing ; to flirt
Just to the point mark'd " dangerous ; " to be
In all things as your set of well-dress'd dolls,
Who, like automatons, moved, spoke, and smiled,
By rules set down and recognised. Ah me !
It cost you much, me more, before you saw
It is impossible to change a flower,
A forest flower, a deep blue violet,
Even by care and culture, hot-house air,
And every rare auxiliary of art,
Into a glowing tulip, rainbow-dyed.
Uproot it as you may, its native earth
Will cling around its fibres ; in its heart
The throbbing, healthful life sends up the sap
To stain its petals of its own true hue.
It did not churlishly refuse to bloom
Where everything was done to welcome it ;
It did not languish 'mid the perfumed air ;
It did not pale within that glare and light—
Though unlike this, its leafy greenwood screen—

Nor did it hang its head with shame among
That brilliant blaze of beauty, where all shone,
And seem'd of fairest form: it simply grew
True to its nature, strong, and flourishing;
Unfolding leaf by leaf and flower by flower,
Till it became a plant of goodly growth,
Though but a violet still, a simple flower,
Which loved to raise its steadfast gaze above,
And drink the dews that fall thence morn and eve
And then, in gratitude, breathe forth, unask'd,
Its tiny wealth of perfume; swelling thus
The tributary incense-wreath that mounts,
And still is wafted on by airy wings,
Till it doth reach the sky. My aunt spoke thus—
"It is not feminine to be unlike
All other girls in fashion, manners, aught
That ranks peculiar: it is vulgar, too,
Aping originality; 'tis best
To follow some well-known, acknowledged style
In everything. It but provokes a smile,
Even from well-bred people, to assume
A style unknown; it jars upon the sense
Of unity, when taken with the mass,
Where all should blend as notes within a chord

Blend, and are mingled softly; or as hues
Melt and are shaded off, each into each,
Upon the peacock's breast. The stones that lie
Upon the beach are rounded all, and smooth;
So, fitting evenly each to its place,
Unscath'd by angularities or points
Of its near neighbour; even when the waves
Dash over them, they softly slip about,
And by their sleekness and their blandness 'scape
Unhurt by contact." Answering which, I said,
More strongly than politely, much I fear,
"Well argued, my fair aunt! quite plausible.
You'll find most people ready to receive
Your pretty argument. Well! let them be
The full-swept chord, the softly-blended hues,
The smooth and slipp'ry pebbles on the beach,
Gliding so easily, the like 'gainst like,
Ne'er meeting with, nor being, obstacle.
Let each obey the instinct in his breast,
To find the place best suited to his views,
Be they or high or low. For me, my aunt,
I cannot lie upon the world's broad strand
In base supineness, lifted by its tides
To little tottering sand-heaps; or cast down

To hollow'd depths, mid grov'lling, creeping things
Harbouring but corruption; cannot wait
In stupid sloth, till its great whelming waves
Wash me quite smooth and round, to slip and slide
In weak servility, or senseless ease,
Amid the million. Rather would I be
A firm, rough rock, though but a little one,
'Gainst which the tow'ring waves might dash and beat,
And breaking up themselves, leave me still firm:
Ah! ready too, when all the mist and spray
Should clear away, to stand out bold and clear,
With rugged breast, to meet again the waves
Uplooming in dim distance. By God's help,
Thus would I struggle all thro' life to keep,
Unchanged, the individuality
He has impress'd me with; still hurling back
Whatever bears on me to wear one line
He has engraven out; smooth down, or break
One angle off, with worldly instruments,
Or for the motives, base enough, you urge."
"You surely do not think it base," said she,
"Beneath your dignity, and useless all,
To so deport yourself, in act and word,
In gentle deeds of courtesy, and thought

Careful for others' feelings, as to move
Somewhat less clumsily than as a clown;
Something more gracefully than as a boor,
Through life and its society? Methinks
The charity you vaunt to us sometimes,
In its high teaching wide embraces this;
And something egotistical, and pride
In your own dwarf'd opinions, as opposed
To world-wide ones, there seems to me to be
In this tirade." I answering again—
"Dear aunt! I did not mean it thus. I would,
In all humility, to noble souls
Bow down, and wait for teaching; but I feel
There is within, a something given of God—
Call it by what you will, genius, power,
Or but peculiarity—which but
To stamp and stifle out—because, forsooth,
It may sometime cause me to stand alone,
A mark'd one in a crowd, or jar upon
My neighbour's finest senses—were a sin,
For which I answer to my God. He wills,
In meekness, yet in firmness, I should strive
To bring this gift up to its fullest pitch
Of perfectness, by every means which comes

Within my reach. And this I mean to do."
My aunt shrugg'd high her shoulders, smiled, a smile
Of half contempt, half pity, look'd fatigued,
And rising, bade me dress for her grand ball,
Just adding, as she glided by, "And, child,
Pray keep your strange, crude notions to yourself,
For my sake, for to-night; my guests are all
Well-bred, refined, and noble. You would shock
Their sensibilities, and seem to them
But a great country school-girl. My wish too
Is, that you dress yourself more as my niece
Should be attired; simplicity in dress
Is not my taste. Now go! your toilette make
As I advised this morning," and she pass'd.
That night the grand reception rooms thrown wide
Were dazzlingly lit up; fair statues gleam'd
From mimic groves, where all the air reel'd back
Faint with the scent of flowers; came rippling sound
Of silver fountains, mid whose wreaths of spray
Flash'd glitt'ring fish unnumber'd, underneath
Myrtle and orange bowers; and everywhere
Shone out rare beauty. Anxiously I watch'd
The stream of visitors arrive, and flow
In gentle undulations o'er the rooms,

In all the wealth of lace, and silk, and flowers;
Of waving plumes, and jewels; till the whole
Glow'd like a full-blown tulip-bed, when morn
Arising suddenly pulls back her veil,
And streams of sunshine darting down, makes glance
The diamonds night flung there. My aunt stood out
In perfect costume—velvet, ruby-hued,
With emeralds, and cherries in her hair;
And emeralds and diamonds clasping arms,
And neck of perfect beauty—stood and bade
Her guests all welcome, in a silver voice
And with a smile an angel might have own'd;
While in asides to me, she commented
On those who pass'd. "Lord Charles, why he has grown
If possible, more handsome than of old,
He really is delightful; by the bye,
He's given to writing sonnets as are you,
Improve that hint. Just look at Ellen Vane!
You scarce would think her thirty-five last March;
She seems but twenty, thanks to style and taste.
Then glance at Ida Leslie; what a queen!
What grace in all her movements! yet I know
How much it cost her mother to tone down
Her native awkwardness; take that hint too!

Here's hope for you, fair niece! upon my word!
The Dowager eclipses all to-night;
Her diamond coronet has been reset,
And what a blaze she walks in! how her robes
Sweep round her!" Then there came Sir Reginald,
So languid, and so pale, I pitied him,
Thinking him just recovering, perhaps,
From some consuming fever; very wide
He open'd his large eyes, and fix'd on air
His vacant gaze, while o'er his parted lips,
The sickliest glimmer of a dawning smile
Just broke; one jewell'd, slender, nerveless hand
Coax'd up his blonde moustache, or daintily
Toy'd with the dangling charms upon his chain;
His step was slow and languid, and he stoop'd
His slim, and sloping shoulders, with an air
So weary, that I turned and to my aunt,
Spoke out my pity in full homely words.
"You silly child!" she laugh'd, amused; "indeed
You must learn better; why, Sir Reginald
Has not been ill, has very good health too
For one who lives at his rate; he is known
As the most elegant and handsome man;
The most refined, and perfect exquisite,

In all our set : girls go half mad for him ;
So that the one he honours with his hand,
Most frequently to dance with, may hold up
Her little head, and star it o'er her peers
At least that night ; and she on whom he deigns
To smile, and pass encomiums, should she be
A débutante, thenceforth will be a belle
Within our world of fashion. So look bright,
And who knows, but the gallant may be struck
For once with wild-wood beauty." "Aunt !" I said,
Abruptly breaking in upon her here,
After long puzzling vainly, "Who is that ?
The tall, dark man, with large and lustrous eyes,
And high, broad brow ?" "Why, child ! you're really
roused
From your late apathy. Ah ! don't flush so !
It looks quite rustic ; pray be calm ! and see !
Your hasty tone has caught young Vernon's ear
And his shrewd mother's. That tall, striking man ?
Well, let me see ! Ah ! now I recollect,
This must be the Sir Oscar Vivian,
But just return'd from travelling in the East ;
Mad on the 'Lost Ten Tribes' and hurrying
now here, now there, o'er half the world, where'er

Rumour hints they may harbour: he is crazed
However on no other point; indeed
Wondrously clever; but, they say, insists
That we are all true Israelites, and brings
All sorts of arguments, and texts, to prove
His theory correct. He's staying with
The Leslies at the Chase, and I suppose
Fair Ida the attraction; wait awhile,
I'll introduce him presently." What more
She might have said I know not, for I shrank
Within a shelt'ring arch and watch'd him close,
And speculated vainly. Here again
We met then, he and I; how different
Our meeting to the last! then nature sway'd
The time, the place, ourselves; he was a youth
Full of the noble deeds of future years,
And strong in hope and faith; I but a child
Upon whose face fell swiftly light and shade
From passing thought; untainted, pure,
As childhood ever should be. Now he was
A full-grown man, perhaps with many hopes
Truly fulfill'd, yet many more still held
Awaiting to be realized; he had
A look not there of old, a look which told

Of passions fought and conquer'd; life-storms braved;
And wrestlings, and strugglings, with real foes—
None the less real, because invisible—
All these had pass'd, like tempests o'er a wood,
Leaving a calm which speaks of conscious strength,
Tried well and proven; certainty of will,
Set to work out life's work. While I, I was
A few steps but from childhood, lingering
As long as possible within its meads;
Peering half anxiously between the flowers
At all the busy worldlings out beyond,
Not knowing what I saw. Now both of us,
Despising tricks and mummery, met where
Such held full sway; and in the court itself
Bow'd down as votaries full loyally.
He pass'd me near; look'd down, and caught my glance,
And then the quiet of his face broke up
In rippling smiles, of quick, and glad surprise;
And hurrying up he greeted me: "I think
I am not wrong in calling you Miss Gower?
For, though some years have flitted since we met
Within Dean's Forest, bringing much of change,
I still can recognise in you, the child

I by my carelessness had well-nigh kill'd."
My aunt turn'd round and wonder'd at our talk;
Drew near and question'd, by her speaking look,
How we had met before. He told the tale
With simpleness and ease, and then we stood
And chatted on, till others claim'd the ear
Of Lady Mulgrave; and a brilliant valse
Bore us like flashing motes within a beam
Down groves of longing gazers: then a pause
Wherein came saunt'ring up Sir Reginald,
And, with his blandest smile, begg'd to remind,
I was his partner for the coming dance;
And after that he kept by me alway
With just the air that says, "There is nothing else
To do to-night, and therefore I do this."
My aunt was charm'd, and complimented me,
And dowagers and dames look'd on and smiled;
While all the fops and beaux came hov'ring round
As bees around a flow'r, and people said,
I was a belle and charming; and I laugh'd
In silence to myself, and thought my thoughts,
And dream'd of other fame, and other name,
To be some day my own, if so 'twas will'd,
Long toiling for could win it; but meantime—

What would you? being woman should I act
Other than woman? could I be displeased?
Being *but* woman—No! Sir Oscar stood,
In grave and striking contrast to the rest,
Apart that night; he knew but few, he said,
And cared not much for dancing; valsed awhile
With Ida Leslie—a most handsome girl,
But strangely statuesque—led out my aunt
In one quadrille, and then resumed his post
Close by some marble statues, in a bower
Of myrtles in full bloom; and seem'd to look
Far off to other scenes. My quizzing aunt
Suggested he was wandering in thought
Amongst lost tribes of Israelites; he held
Aloof from me nor spoke through all that night;
But when the guests were thinning, and I rose,
Weary of list'ning to the senseless lisp
Sir Reginald kept whisp'ring, and pass'd by
The rooms yet crowded; some one follow'd close,
And, as I put aside the silken folds,
Shielding the entrance to the balcony,
Whence feebly peer'd the dawning daylight in,
Sir Oscar stood beside me, with my cloak,
Which gravely he wrapp'd round me; bow'd him low;

Bade me adieu ! hoping I felt no ill
From my repeated dancing : turn'd and went
While I, tho' longing to say much, said nought,
Descended slowly by the marble steps
Down leading from the balcony, and thus
On to the soft, green lawn ; here wand'ring on
I listen'd to the song of waking birds,
And watch'd the streaks of crimson, blue, and gold,
Which lined the sky where quickly darted up
The full round sun ; then slowly, softly, down
A golden mist came dropping, till it spread
Through all the vale. The cool delicious air
Fann'd my hot brow ; the splendour of the flowers
Paled those art-made I wore. Struck by the thought
I snatch'd the wreath away, and shook my hair,
Letting it fall in its full freedom down
In tangled waves. " Forgive me ! this is wrong !
You run great risk standing thus lightly clad
In morning's fresh'ning air." " What, you here now ? "
I said ; " Sir Oscar, I had deem'd myself
At last alone." " Your pardon ! I but pass'd
This way as easiest access to the chase ;
The lovely morning tempted me to walk,
And seeing you so heedless of a cold

I could but stop and caution!" "You forget,"
I made reply, "I am a forest child,
And not so tender as the dainty dames
Who dwell in towns: I rise by dawn at home,
And wander out while yet the dew stands thick
In strings of pearls, upon the lily-beds,
And fear nor cold nor fever." "Ah!" he said,
"What would Sir Reginald reply to that?"
"Sir Reginald!" I sneer'd; "and what care I
What he may say? the sickly, lisping ape!"
Sir Oscar smiled and started at my burst
Of rude and childish petulance; and said,
"Are you not happier as the fêted queen
Bow'd down to and admired; smiled on; upheld
As quite a model, than you would have been
There in your forest home, unseen, unknown
Except by boors and peasants?" "Which is best?"
I answer'd him, "the seeming or the real?"
He turn'd at that and let the full rich glow
Flooding his eyes, beam on me, as I look'd
Coldly and calmly up to him. "'Tis well!"
He said at last, "Child! keep that question close
Up to your heart's closed portals; tell me now
What brought you from your forest haunts, out here

To mockeries and falsehood?" So I told
The why and wherefore; then he took my hand,
As one might take a little toddling child's,
Led me by smooth-kept paths towards the house
And up the marble steps; but shook his head
As in the breeze I shudder'd; there he stood
With easy grace, and wish'd me fair good morn,
And hurried down the garden; I walk'd through
The open'd window, curtain'd still, and found
The guests all gone; then stealing to my room
And throwing off my ornaments and dress,
Lay down and slept. This, Lady Gwendoline,
Was my first introduction to a round
Of constant gaieties; balls, parties, routs;
And now and then—they said, in compliment
To me as a young poetess—an eve
Devoted to light literature. My aunt
Held such a conversazione once, and I,
Poor child! was made forsooth! to open it
By reading out some weak, appropriate lines
I had been told to write: but let me say,
In part excuse, however spoilt I was,
Displays like this were yet distasteful quite,
And made but at my aunt's express command

Which none dared break. At all these merry fêtes
The same set met; so that in time I grew
Familiar, and easy with them all;
And though despising heartily the gilt
With which they glitter'd o'er what makes a lie,
I found beneath the outward, studied calm
Of many a fair young face, an aching heart,
And pitying learnt to soothe. Poor Ida! well
Can I recall the misery of her look,
When she beheld Sir Reginald bend low
And whisper senseless nothings in my ear.
I saw the mystery of her haughtiness
In that one glance, which looking up I caught—
It was a revelation; a rent torn
In fashion's mask, through which reality
Pour'd quick'ning light: it help'd me then at once
To set her at her ease, and spite of all
My aunt could say, most earnestly I tried
To show Sir Reginald my cool contempt;
Though, had I known as certainly as now,
How surely self-conceit can blind the eyes
To truth's fair view, I had not wonder'd so
At his obtuseness. Now Sir Oscar came
A welcome guest to every gathering;

For he was high by birth, and talented;
More than the average handsome; very rich;
And mothers added, ought to choose a wife;
Doubtless he would; perhaps 'twas that he sought
In coming home to England; it was said
He had, on first inheriting his lands,
The family mansion almost all rebuilt
And splendidly refurnish'd: it must be
He meant to marry, since he had no one,
Mother nor sister, aunt, to need the style
Of furniture he chose. So mothers smiled
Complacently, when Ada, Belle, or Maude,
Were singing, dancing, riding out with him;
And wonder'd which he'd choose; and these fair girls
Dress'd, sigh'd and smiled; and lavish'd every art
To catch so good a prize, so near to win.
While he, as if unconscious, courteous, calm;
Ready to yield to beauty, merit, youth,
The meed of praise, 'tis true, but then, no more!
For me, he never had a word of praise;
For when, on finishing a song I rose
Greeted on all sides by a buzz of thanks;
He, coldly walking up, would criticise
And bid me practise more my scales and turns,

Or, reading out aloud to some few friends
My latest poem, lauded and approved,
Perhaps on seeing it he would condemn
A metaphor or figure; say 'twere best
To read more, and write less: depreciate
The subject, style, or rhythm; all I did
Seem'd ill-done now by him, and only won
His cold rebuke; till presently I thought
How it could be that, pleasing all I fail'd
To please this one, who ever held him far
Disdainful back, or met me but to chide.
One thing was plain, he thought my merit small;
And then this thought would somehow irritate
And urge my spirit on to higher flights;
From mount to mount; from craggy point to point;
From hillock up to mountain, where all faint
It wearied fell, down through the amber air,
To stretch itself on amaranthine flowers,
And feast upon the luscious honey-dew,
Warm'd through and through with sunlight, till refresh'd
It rose again, as eaglet to the sun,
Out-scattering from pinions strong, the dews
It gather'd up erewhile; so thro' the air
Its flight was traced by show'rs of sparkling gems

Descending on the gazers; on again!
Swooping beneath the heaven's triumphal arch—
The glowing rainbow—brush'd from it rare hues
To lace amid its plumage; beat the air
With untired wing till diamond atoms fell
In rain around; then swept so near the sun
That all its plumage caught a golden fringe;
Its head a halo. All alike in vain!
Sir Oscar would not give one word of praise,
And all my little crowd of flatterers said
Seem'd nought without it.

V.

'Twas summer still, when one day wearied out,
And sated more than usual with the dose
Of flattery administer'd, I stole
Gently away from all the giddy throng,
And wander'd where I hoped to be alone,
Down through the garden, where the flow'rs half closed,
Hung drooping from a lately fallen shower,
Whose pelting drops had beaten out, unchidden,
The rich perfume now floating like a mist
Upon the evening air. I wander'd on
Pond'ring on many things, and somewhat sad;
When, stooping down to raise a trailing vine
Barring my path, I heard a voice I knew
In converse with Sir Oscar passing down
An avenue of roses running close
To where I stood unseen; and stepping back
Behind the shelt'ring trees, I watch'd them near,
And heard James Gordon say, "Upon my word!

You are too hard ! poor little Mildred Gower !
Is not so bad as that." Sir Oscar then—
"She is quite spoilt, I say; when yet a child,
Some few years back, she struck me as a flower
Of quite uncommon growth; the forest shades
She dwelt amidst, the pure and bracing air,
The healthful life, combined to render her
All that a girl should be; gentle, sweet,
Modest and truthful; artless, kind, sincere;
Confiding ever; eager to do right;
And with a mind that promised better things,
Lit up by God-given genius: but see now,
All is subverted; you, and all your set,
Have turn'd her head with all your senseless praise;
True to the weakness of her sex, she thinks
More of her beauty than her mental gifts,
Nor prizes these, but as a means to draw
More worshippers around. She schools her face
And decks it in false smiles, till utterly
It now has lost the pow'r that made it once
A mirror, o'er whose surface, robed in white,
Pass'd all her pure emotions. Silly child !
She's bidding fair to be a thing of art;
A puppet, work'd on springs by any one,

Like every girl you see here. Do not ask
Or think that I shall help such evil on;
Nor blame me, tho' I frown, as you have said,
And 'chide the little one!' I pity her,
Poor child! Her mother would not sanction it,
Nor her high-soul'd old father. Silly child!
Yet after all, what wonder, with a guide
So heartless as her aunt, and"——Faint and far
The voices grew, till here I lost the sense,
And dashing back the dripping boughs, I rush'd,
All damp with scatter'd drops upon my hair,
To my own room; there, sinking on a couch,
I strove to calm the storm within my breast,
Which raged so fiercely. Ah! where'er I turn'd,
Traced on the air, I saw those cruel words,
In characters of glowing, steady fire.
Or if I closed mine eyes, they sounded close,
In maddening distinctness on my ear;
True to each rise and fall, each pause and tone;
The hard and cutting emphasis which mark'd
This speech throughout. So I was, to his thought,
[illegible]ppant, flirting, vain, conceited girl!
[illegible]e of all that class which heartily
[illegible] despised! What then? and was it true?

Was I indeed, then, sweeping round and round
The whirl of folly I had so condemn'd
When first beholding? I had thought myself
A gazer only; but then, had the whirl
So dazed my senses, that the rapid tide
Could bear me on, unknowing, with the rest?
"Come, let me wake and think," I said aloud.
Then carefully I tried to scan my deeds,
Sifting their motives since my sojourn there.
And after that I stood before my glass,
Looking full long on what it shadow'd. Then,
"He's right!" I said; "Sir Oscar is quite right!
I am 'a vain, weak girl, a silly child!'
More—a weak coward, sinning against light,
For, knowing myself bless'd with precious gifts,
I thought to rest secure upon that rock,
Which tower'd aloft, above the noise and din
Of murmurs down below; and took no heed
To guard my footsteps, or to keep awake;
But, slumb'ring idly, lo! I tripp'd and slid
Noiseless and easily, far down amid
That senseless herd, and mingled with them there,
Learning their ways, intent to catch the aim
And end of all their revelry and mirth;

Nor knew I fell, till waken'd suddenly
By this rough blow. Oh! well that it should fall
So hard and cruelly: I sleep no more;
But, bruised and smarting, up and quickly turn,
And, heedless of all barriers, scale anew
The height I fell from slumb'ring. Spoilt I am,
Yet not entirely, Oscar Vivian!
'A silly child!' who took each gilded toy
For precious metal; swallow'd flattery
Because it is the fashion: this and more
I did, not knowing how I wrong'd myself:
My head was weak, I own; it shall grow strong;
My heart stout ever, ten times stouter now;
And so the twain I wed to-night anew,
And link them to one purpose. 'Pretty face!'
I said, and nodded to my semblance clear
Reflected in the mirror. 'Pretty face
Of smiles and tears, from henceforth be content
To do the will of soul, and heart, and mind;
And be their ready slave. And now, to work!
Though day is closing up in starry night,
I will not sleep, nor rest, till something done
Shall mark a turning-point.'" Then sending down
Excuses to my aunt, that I appear'd

No more that night, I barr'd my chamber door,
And putting off my cumbersome attire,
Threw on a wrapper, shook abroad my hair,
And set me to my work. Below, the hum
Of many voices sounded; then a song
Came floating up; Sir Oscar sang—and, yes!
A song of my own making—in such tones,
So rich, and deep, and manly, it did seem
His heart pour'd out its inmost melody,
As 'twere a stream up-broken. I arose,
Pull'd down the window, shutting out the sounds,
And to my task again. Up came the beat,
The measured beat, of dancers whirling round;
And through each crevice came the quicken'd pulse
Of that mad valse. It master'd me; I sat,
My pen in hand, till that should also cease,
Striving to think on steadily: in vain!
I found my spirit wandering away
To tread the fairy circles of that dance,
As surely as the dancers. Then a rest,
And merry laughter, in a silvery voice,
Sounding quite near. I, scarcely knowing why,
Rose up and left my room, and glancing down,
Saw Ida Leslie clinging to the arm

Of Oscar Vivian, like a tender flower
To some dark rock; there, floating in a mist
Of silvery white, down through the lobby wide
She came, oft smiling tenderly and sweet,
And glancing up at him. I could not see
His face, 'twas bent so low, but lingeringly
He seem'd to lead her on. I turn'd again,
For I had seen enough, and closed my door;
Yet, feeling weary, put the curtains back,
And look'd out on the sky, where still the stars
Moved noiseless on their way; the moon alone
With darken'd lamp had gone. Lo! there again,
I saw Sir Oscar leading Ida down
The entrance-steps, and to her carriage, where
He placed and left her; linger'd till it passed;
Then, turning round, he lifted up his head,
And in the light outstreaming from the hall,
I saw the same sweet smile upon his face,
As when he soothed the little suff'ring child
He carried thro' the wood. I started back,
And dropp'd the curtain twixt me and the light,
The dewy, dreamy light of thousand stars,
And work'd with added vigour. Every sound
Had ceased below, and all the household lay

In sleep or silence, save myself alone.
I wrote on many hours, unheeding time;
Wrote passionate and bitterly; wrote thus—
"Take me afar! I madden here; afar
From these fix'd bounds, these trimly-kept parterres,
Hedged with proprieties, like prickly pears;
Where every flower is taught to spring and sigh,
To bloom, to blush; nay! further still, to die,
By most approved of rules; where everything
Is bounded by an angle, or a ring,
Or heart (base use on't!); where line after line
Meet where 'tis best, run parallel, combine;
Diverge awhile. Where there's a beaten track
Stretch'd, O how smooth! so that you cannot lack
A carved-out path to any part you will;
Where all that meets *the eye*, you'll find, is still
In perfect order. Oh! for mercy's sake,
Take me away! My heart must die or break
Before 'twill bear to be thus cut and set
In the unvaried style. Away! while yet
The wish to fly is upmost. Out afar
Let me dart freely, without let or bar,
Into deep wilds, where Nature's self doth spread
Tents of green verdure, tender moss to tread.

Madden'd, I feel like some wild prairie steed,
Taught to forget its fierce and headlong speed,
And curb'd and rein'd, chafed with the cruel bit,
Broken, subdued, for daily use made fit.
They're striving hard to dash out every mark
Placed by the Master's hand, who sets apart
Some things for higher uses than mere gain.
Have they not learn'd, these grov'llers of the plain!
Wisdom from binding Pegasus? that now
They bind his progeny to cart and plough;
And tie their wings, and place them in the pound,
Hoodwink their eyes, and turn them to the ground,
When they scan heaven. Out! I cannot stay!
Tear off the trappings! dash the rein away!
And, with pride's madd'ning spur yet sticking fast
In either side, sweep, like a rushing blast,
All fleck'd with foam and blood and gored and gash'd;
With the vile mire of slander foully splash'd;
Eyes wild and bloodshot, roll'd in leaping flame;
Nostrils wide-gaping, whence the furious strain
Of every nerve and muscle pours the breath
In fiery volume. On! on! on! tho' death
Itself stood midway in my path, I rush
Into the wilds, where I may feel the gush

Of cooling streams; perhaps the torrent's tone,
To thunder madden'd, may out-storm my own
Wild burst of passion. Let me scour along,
Tearing the soft turf up, and down among
The alders, and the osiers, plash, and crush
The floating duck-weed, and the mud-born rush.
On! o'er the hill, upon whose upturn'd brow
The noon-day sun has burnt his token now.
On o'er the wide-spread downs, where footsteps' beat
Starts the sweet lark from fern-leaves at my feet.
On! on! on! on! the vale, the mead, the stream,
Are pass'd, and left behind, like midnight's dream;
And here amid this wild, calm, solemn wood,
I'll pause to rest, and check my fiery mood.
In these cool shades I'll lay my burning head
Low in the moss, and let the dark trees spread
Their huge arms o'er me. So! now murmur low
Sweet mother nature! in your tender flow
Of lullaby. Alas! Ah me! 'tis vain!
This voiceless solitude but mocks my pain!
No sound! no whisper! nothing but the throb
Of my own bursting heart, or choking sob
Which yet I try to strangle on my lip;
No movement! not the quiver of a tip

Of tenderest grass; nought but my trembling limbs
That I must nerve to steadiness; no hymns
Of nature through these aisles; no thundering sound
Of joyous waters in their onward bound;
Only a calm, more hideous to my mood,
That furies fast have chased me to this wood
In headlong haste; and now I turn to sky,
To earth, to tree, to stream, for sympathy,
And still they look as ever they have been—
Blue, deep, unfathomable, soft, cool, serene.
Oh! I could sweep them out of being there!
'Tis awful to feel thus and see the sneer
On human faces round; but oh! 'tis sad
To gaze on nature when our souls are mad
With cruel agony, and mark the while,
How she doth wear the same eternal smile.
Must then a human soul be wrung out thus,
And nature smile, nor redden to a flush
Of conscious anger? Yes! or oh! my God!
The stones had wept whereon Thy torn feet trod
When climbing up to Calvary.——Be still!
Oh! egotistic soul, and learn the will
Of the Great Master is—that nothing should
Be moved, or altered, just to suit thy mood,

On which He once did look and call it "good."
————————Ah! we may rave and fume;
Spin out the darkest threads upon life's loom;
Storm to the sky; howl to the passing wind;
Wail of our mis'ry to each stream, and find
That nature looks as calm, as though we too
Were steep'd in sweet contentment thro' and thro'.
What then? is not this well? Ay! very so!
Else were there strange confusion here below;
Strange! strange! indeed, if ev'ry time a worm
Writhes in dumb pain, the sky, and sea, should turn
Fiery with rage; the mountains sway and toss;
And mighty rocks dash headlong, at a loss
How best to show their sympathy. Oh man!
Writhe as thou wilt beneath sin's bitter ban;
Rave, or be mute, or calm, yet for thy sake
Think not creation's weakest nerve will shake."
I threw my pen down here, my lamp waned dim,
Flared up again, then flicker'd and went out.
And looking through the window, lo! the night
Had gone, and through the curtains drawn aside,
The soft and rosy light of early dawn
Came streaming in reproachfully; then I
Snatch'd yet again my pen and thus I wrote—

" I have sinn'd foully ! I have tried to stamp
The image out God press'd upon my soul
And put another there ; one too that man
Might read, more plainly, one that is for use,
For household use, they falsely think more fit.
I have been wrong ! been wrong ! I thought to take
My own heart up and model it at will ;
Pressing it in more there ; curtailing here ;
Hard'ning a so-call'd weakness ; lopping back
Luxuriant overgrowth of feelings ; at
The pleasure of blind gazers. Oh my God !
I knelt beside my soul—as one might kneel
In the still desert, by some crystal fount,
Up-welling slowly from the rounded bed
It hollow'd in the sand—I knelt, at noon
When the uncurtain'd sun sat up aloft
In burning majesty, I knelt and put
The tangled briars and noxious weeds aside,
And forced myself to look into the depths,
So clear, yet so mysterious. Then I stayed,
As they of old, beside that pool, till came
The angel of His Presence softly down,
Troubling the waters ; and down falling there,
I laved me in them, till, renew'd and strong,

I went into the world, when, lo! they cry,
'Fool! get thee hence; thou'rt mad!' and then
Night fell—the cool, dark night—and silently
Again I put the tangled briars aside,
And knelt beside the fount that had its rise
In the eternal hills, and with my hands,
Hollow'd and trembling, scoop'd the glitt'ring pool
Of its upspringing waters, save the small
And softly welling spring, that bubbled up
Despite my frantic efforts; this, at last,
I foul'd with mire; I stamp'd down in the sand;
And, utterly despoil'd, 'twas hidden there;
Smooth'd over, lest it trip a stranger-foot,
As heretofore. O fool! O thrice-made fool!
To dare with thy clay fingers seek to change,
To cramp, degrade, pervert, God's own good gift
Of genius! O thou fool! Is God a man
To be thus mock'd of thee?"

VI.

My mother's weekly letter came next day,
As fond as usual; breathing gentle fears
That so much gaiety would make me care
Less for my quiet home, where now, she said,
Was cause for some anxiety. Of late,
My father had been speculating much,
And lost, what sum she knew not, but still hoped
Things would not be so bad as now they look'd;
All might be well at last. "For you, my love,"
She added, "'tis far better to remain
With your kind aunt at present; do not fear!
But wait in patience meekly, knowing well
All things are for our good." What's this? I cried,
While grief in shadowy outline crouches low,
Close by our hearth, and threatens, I must be
Still cared for first, put back by loving hands
Amidst the warm sunshine, for fear its frown—
Grief's baleful frown—should blight me, and I mourn.

"Nay, mother dear!" I wrote, "I am not now
The frail, weak child I was. This sunny clime,
In which I stray'd these few months past, doth force
Buds quickly into blossoms: fashion's sun
Doth swell and ripen rapidly the fruits
To golden and to purple, hanging high
Within her fair domain. But, mother mine!
Your child—as but a wild, uncultured vine,
Climbing the hedge, half curious to look in—
While basking there unchidden, drew enough
From soil and sun, and *but* enough, to feed
Its native growth, and help its progress on.
So fear no more for me! Doth grief appear?
Who but your child should cheer you? Let me come!
My heart has plumed herself long, long ago,
And wing'd her way to nestle in your breast."
My aunt opposed my leaving earnestly;
Said 'twas impossible; she had her plans
Arranged for months to come: a fête champêtre
Was coming off next week at Mrs. More's,
Which we must go to: she should give a ball
And arch'ry meeting early in next week,
And many other things. "Besides," said she,
"I mean to make your fortune; silly girl!

Why flout Sir Reginald for ever so?
Do be more kind sometimes: it is too bad!
When I have given him hope, to see you turn
As coldly from him as a rose from snow.
Be reasonable, dear Mildred! Say no more
Of these dull fancies; give him but a smile,
And he'll propose forthwith; nay! do not speak.
I know you're modest, child; but now, at last,
He really is in earnest: cheer up, too!
Your mother, most unfortunately, was
From childhood first to see the darkest side
Of everything. I feel convinced that this
Is only nervousness." "My aunt!" I cried,
"Some things you said I really must refuse
To promise acquiescence in. Learn, now!
I do not like Sir Reginald; indeed
Despise and loathe him, for a weak, vain fop!
A heartless coward too! who makes a game
Of winning women's hearts, and stringing them—
As boys do birds' eggs; worse, as flutt'ring flies
Upon a hair, and list'ning to the whirr
Of their great agony—he smiles and smirks,
And dangling them in view, looks round to claim
's meed of praise as victor!" "Pray, fair niece!

Am I to learn from this most fierce outburst
Of harsh invectives,—hearts, eggs, flies, and terms
Most vulgar,—that you finally refuse
The hand of this Sir Reginald, should he
Honour you by the offer?" "*Honour* me!"
I scornfully repeated. "Honour me!
Why I stand up far, far above him, aunt!
High up in clouds; he grovels in the dust,
And creeps, and crawls, as reptiles"—"Hold, I pray!"
My aunt said with great dignity; "he is
A friend of mine; I beg you pay respect
At least to all my friends; and since you rave
Thus wildly at the mention of a man
Who *only* is a well-born gentleman,
And so no mate for you, why look around!
Amongst the rest, and choose; for, silly child!
I will not let you ruin this good chance
Of settling well in life. There is—oh yes!
Sir Oscar Vivian owns a good estate,
And in all conscience lives enough in clouds
To please e'en your high views; 'tis true I see
That Ida Leslie thinks she's winning there;
But I know better. Child! why don't you speak!
What ails you? faint! Well there! lie down and rest,

Nor think of home and horrors." But I sprang
With sudden fierceness up and said, "I hate
This dreadful market-place they call the world,
Where human hearts and hopes are bought and sold,
As dumb, brute beasts, for gold, and bound for life
As slaves to masters; scourged, torn deep, thrown
down,
And trampled under foot; I hate the world!
With all its hideousness! I hate this life—
Life did I call it? rather daily death—
I drag out here; your whirl of folly stops
My fainting heart, and dizzies my poor head.
I pray you send me home!" "The child is mad!
Most surely mad!" my aunt, alarmed, said low;
"This horrid news has heated her tired brain,
And caused this ebullition; rest!" she said
In gentle tones to me, and laid her hand,
Her cool, soft hand upon my burning brow,
Putting the thick curls from my hot, flush'd cheeks
So tenderly, I could but kiss her hand,
And weep, as woman weeps when she has thought
To be the bravest, standing up at bay
Before the hated foe with slight form drawn
Up to its fullest height; with slender throat

Swollen out by anger; head thrown proudly back;
Eyes flashing with fierce gleams of fiery wrath;
Ready for firm contentions, when, behold!
A tone of tenderness, a look of love,
From her calm foe disarms her, and she turns
A rosy red, then all her weakness comes
In sick'ning faintness o'er her, and she sinks,
Dissolved in gentleness, upon the breast
Erewhile she would have torn, and sobs, and weeps
Such tears as she alone of all can weep—
Half passionate, half meek; wrung out in wrath
By sudden tempest, yet a moment more
All rainbow-spann'd by love's illuming sun
Before they're kiss'd away by fiercer heat.
And so she conquer'd by her gentleness,
And with her cool collectedness allay'd
My fiery outburst; soothed, and petted me—
And, mind you this! I loved her—till I, urged
Still more by hints from home, resign'd myself
To what seem'd fate, and stay'd with my kind aunt,
Who once more plann'd a round of gaiety
Which I should tread with her; in vain I spoke
Of my unfinish'd poem, as excuse
For my craved absence; nothing could I gain

Save forced permission to remain retired
Some few brief morning hours, when eagerly
I wrote and studied; wrote as once of old,
Because I needs must write, not as of late,
To please, and pander, to the tastes of those
Who in return fed up my vanity
With unearn'd praise. I put these poems by,
For firmly I refused to read them now
At our réunions; vainly urged my aunt,
I simply said I much preferr'd to be
A listener; Sir Oscar raised at that
His dark, grave eyes, and gave a searching look,
Which I unshrinking bore; and slowly came,
As still I gazed, a semblance of the look
Of tenderness I twice before had seen
Beam down on me and Ida; then it paled,
And slowly pass'd away, while quietly
He near'd, and when the others crowded round
A lady, singing sweetly, bending low,
He said, in calm, clear tones, "Has then the muse
Play'd truant lately? Or, have tender themes
Engaged your thoughts, and driven far away
Your homage to her?" "Nay, Sir Oscar! Still
rite at times; what tender themes, think you,

Could claim my thoughts?" "Forgive me!" he replied,
And hesitating, added, "I have said
Perhaps too much." "Too much," I said, "left thus;
Yet add a little, and 'twill be enough."
He, smiling, "I had heard Sir Reginald
Speak as a favour'd lover only should,
And—pray, forgive me!—I was led to think
That you did favour him; indeed! your aunt"——
"Oh, please, forbear!" I broke in here on him:
"How could you think Sir Reginald could be
My choice?" And, with my usual burst of pride,
I added, "I would sooner wed a clown,
With common sense, and true and gen'rous heart,
Than that cold-hearted, shallow, brainless ape!"
He smiled. "But you forget that he is rich;
Has broad, fair lands, and jewels; is, besides,
The most sought-after man by fond mammas
Throughout the county: he is elegant,
And very handsome; never, I am sure,
Have you beheld him acting but as quite
The polish'd gentleman." "But which," I said,
In low and trembling accents, "which is best,
The seeming or the real?" At that he turn'd
His half-averted head, and faced me full,

And howsoe'er he will'd it so or not,
The calmness of his face was broken up
In sudden light; just as the cold, grey sea
Is broken up in little rippling waves,
By an unlook'd for breeze; and his grave mouth—
Grave always, stern sometimes—relax'd so much,
And his great eyes look'd down so tearfully,
That, trembling at the change my speech had made,
I waited fearful till he spoke. "'Tis well!"
He seem'd at last to breathe, much more than say;
"'Tis well! thank God for that! and I have err'd
In thinking you perverted to the forms,
The hollow forms, of things you meet with here,
And heartless grown as they." "Nay! you were right!"
I hastily replied. "I did conform—
Nay! more, I enter'd heart and head awhile,
Deep in their whirl; and, chasing round and round
The shadow, lost the substance, till at last,
Stumbling, I fell." I long'd to say
How he it was who threw me from my height,
By his blunt speech within the rose-arcade,
But pride forbade it. "It is very well,"
He made reply, "that you are given to see
Things as they are, not as they seem; keep clear

That eyesight of the soul: you know whence comes
Its strength and power;" and very gravely fell
His deep-toned words amidst the buzz and din
Of silly speeches round: no word fell short
Of its intended goal; I noted them,
And stored them up, with many more he said
That memorable evening, and they run,
For evermore, in rhyme and rhythm, through
My mem'ry, to a melody my heart
Sang out to them in entering. No more
Did he speak harsh or sternly; only still
He strove to guide and keep me on secure
Within the path of right, and eagerly
I sought his counsel in a hundred things,
Where strong, good sense was needed; thus he read
And criticised my verses and my songs;
Scann'd them; revised them; sang them in such tones,
That I but knew their depths of tenderness
When render'd thus, their true significance.
So were we day by day together thrown;
Met at all parties, dances, picnics, walks;
Discuss'd whatever subject upmost came
In general converse; talk'd with dozens round,
In their own language, yet a mystery

To others than ourselves; he tinging all
He utter'd, with the colouring of a mind,
Gifted by art and nature; I, uncheck'd,
Fearing no misconstruction, giving rein
To rampant thought, and fancy; thus at last,
Tuned to one key, our thoughts rang sweetly out
In mellow chimes a music, owning not
Nor jar, nor check, nor discord. Still thee, heart
Why throb so wildly in my heavy breast,
As though the past were present? quiet now
Thy mad up-leapings! 'tis a memory
And but a memory I write; no more!

VII.

THERE was a wondrous cavern, some miles' drive
From Lady Mulgrave's mansion; once a year
The owner threw it open, lighted it,
And people flock'd from far and near, to see
Its shadowy depths, its arch'd and vaulted cells,
Its dens, and passages, and mysteries.
The day came round, my aunt a chosen band
Had ask'd to form a merry party there,
And picnic afterwards amid the woods
Around the cave. Some drove, and others rode;
Sir Oscar, Ida Leslie, Lizzie Leigh,
Sir Reginald and I walk'd through the fields
And winding bowery lanes. Fiercely the sun
Shone up aloft, but ever grateful shade
Brooded around us, from the hanging trees.
Beneath our feet, the rich long grass lay thick,
A carpet fit for emperors to tread;
How the flowers nodded to us as we pass'd!

How the wind whisper'd messages of love!
How the stream murmur'd riddles never solved!
And how the sea, low down, kept thundering
Its mystery-fraught music! like the pulse,
Or heart-beat of the earth, it heaved, and swell'd,
Under strange throes as if of agony.
It rose, and fell; it tore, and chafed the bands
That bound it to earth's bosom; wail'd, complain'd,
Threw itself madly on the cruel rocks,
And sobb'd itself to rest that was not peace.
We talked of it, this grand and glorious sea!
It circled us, and drew us out, in strange
And nameless sympathy towards itself.
Morn, noon, and night, we heard it; everywhere
Its voice kept sounding an accompaniment
To all we did and thought. So near the coast
My aunt's house was, so much I loved the sea,
That never did we wander far enough
To lose its music. Early every morn
It woke me; through the day it talk'd to me:
When spirit-sore, and sick at heart, I went
To hold sweet converse with it; when my mind
Was toss'd in turmoil, and my spirit chafed
At things around, I yet must needs endure,

I sat me down just where its breaking waves
Might leap and dash themselves to clouds of spray,
And in the mad confusion lost my own;
And from the turmoil, somehow won back calm.
In the slim twilight hour, it hinted at
Sweet tender thoughts, and rhymed of themes unsung
In glare of day. If in the starry night
I waken'd wond'ring, like a watchful nurse,
It croon'd soft lullabies, till slumber fell
Again in peace upon me. This bright day
Its music seem'd a grand triumphal march,
Mid which were yet dim warnings of far things,
Forebodings darkly touch'd on; though around
Were all things beautiful and joyous. Thus
We wander'd on, and reach'd the wooded hill
Within whose bosom yawn'd the mystic cave:
Gain'd the low portal, and we enter'd in—
There what a sight burst on our wond'ring eyes!
We went from summer day to blackest night!
Then groping on turn'd round a jutting rock,
And found ourselves amid a fairy-scene!
Long lines of shining lamps, like glow-worms, mark'd
The slipp'ry paths, amid the brooding gloom,
Safest to walk; above, the vaulted roof

Sprung into vastness; arch succeeded arch;
Whence stalactites in clust'ring masses hung
Shimmering in lustrous beauty, clinging close
To upward jutting stalagmites: afar
Yawn'd the mysterious darkness, mid whose depths,
Chambers, and vaults, still lengthen'd on and on,
Into yet unknown distance: from above,
As from below, gleam'd starry lamps, and threw
Strange glimmer on the shiny walls, and lit
The falling drops to mimic globes of light.
Strange gnome-like beings torches bore, and stood
Weird sentinels, to help us on our way
Amid the clogging clay and slipp'ry stones.
We reach'd a vaulted chamber; in the midst
Arose a perfect pulpit, nature-form'd
From the primeval rock; so high o'er head
Sprung the vast arch, its top was lost in gloom.
Below, rough rocks and stones; and round, and o'er,
Gleam'd still the stalactites. Here then we heard
A lecture on the cave and its contents;
Its history, and legends; how it own'd
Bears', and wolves' dens; remains of human bones,
And strange barbarian instruments; which we
Were bidden to inspect. We follow'd close

Our weird torch-bearing guide, who chatter'd fast,
Of what, I know not, for, I stray'd apart,
Far as I dared, to think my thoughts alone,
And nurse uncheck'd my fancies. All at once,
A buxom dame—her progress cumber'd much
By her unwieldy person—pass'd, and push'd
Abruptly on me; then, to save a fall,
I ran down a declivity close by,
Where, loose moist stones so roll'd, and rocks so barr'd,
That, thinking to escape them, I but urged
My speed to greater. There were cries behind,
From those I left, that seem'd to call, or warn;
But now the power to stay my steps was gone:
Down the steep path I went amid the gloom:
Dense grew the darkness; on before me yawn'd
Still blacker depths: the cries were lost far back
In the dim distance; only my own steps,
Or here and there the rumble of loose stones
My feet spurn'd from their places.—Horror now
Came over me; for, in the shades ahead
A vast abyss was open'd; few steps more,
And I must plunge in headlong; drop by drop
I heard, in horrible distinctness fall,
The trickle of pent water: one wild cry

Burst from me, and I threw my arms aloft
As one death-smitten. Something stay'd me then ;
Something that was not darkness, rock, or death ;
Something that sway'd with me, and stagger'd back
A few short paces, bearing me clasp'd close
To warm and palpitating form. Some one
Breathing a quick and low "Thank God!" still kept
Strong, staying arms about me—I was saved!
Sir Oscar held me ; then I knew no more.
When I unclosed my eyes, the sunlight stream'd
Unclouded down upon me ; flowers grew thick
Amidst the grass I lay on, and around
Kind anxious faces gazed on me. My aunt
Was shedding genuine tears when down she stoop'd
To kiss and bless me. One knelt near, and held
My head, whom seeing not, I knew. My life
Stole back to me but slowly, for the shock
Was not to be soon combated. I lay
Quietly there amid the trees and flowers,
And watch'd the sober'd party cluster close
Around the gipsy-fire, and spread the feast
Upon the mossy carpet. Overhead
The birds were wildly singing, and my heart
Sent upward with their lays, in gratitude,

Its thankful praises. Very grave, and hush'd,
Sir Oscar kept the curious back, and stood
Sentry and nurse beside me. He, it seem'd,
Had, when I first rush'd onward in the cave,
Follow'd my steps with horror, knowing well
Whither they tended; even, where below
There yawn'd a straighten'd chasm, entrance to
A subterranean lake, whose waters black,
Torch-light reveal'd, but plummet could not sound.
Exit, and entrance, none had ever found,
Only that there, like horror, motionless,
It brooded ever. Like a flash there came
Conviction on him that I near'd that spot;
And, rushing up a steep, he threw himself
Quickly before, and stay'd me; backward then
Bearing me to the horror-stricken crowd
That follow'd quailing there. A deadly swoon
Wrapped me long time in senselessness. I woke,
As I have said, aweary and subdued;
And, caring not to join the merry throng,
Crouch'd mid the flowers and ponder'd.
I knew not then, but later time reveal'd,
How poor Sir Reginald had clasp'd his hands,
And, turning white as any sickly girl,

Pray'd some one would go save me; making not
One effort though himself; he even shed
Weak baby-tears, and from his pendant chain
Loosed vinaigrette, and took refreshing snuffs;
And wrung his jewell'd hands, with feeble moans
Of fright and grief: and when he knew me safe,
Danced a mad caper on the slipp'ry floor,
And falling ignominiously, display'd
Great horror at his awkwardness; drew near
And made long flatt'ring speeches; hover'd round
With tiresome orders, bidding every one
To do impossibilities, and fetch,
For instant application, remedies
The most opposed imaginable,
And quite unneeded. Lady Mulgrave sigh'd
With weariness at last, and whisp'ring said—
"Did ever such a contrast live before
Together, as these two! Sir Reginald
Is like a chatt'ring, senseless monkey, full
Of aimless restlessness in time of need;
Instead of helping, hind'ring; he is quite
Transformed by this small contretemps; no more
The polish'd gentleman; but tricksy ape;
Upon, my word! Darwinian theories

For the first time suggest themselves to me
As more than possible; refreshing quite
It is to turn to Oscar Vivian,
As self-possess'd as ever, calm and prompt;
Not ordering, but acting; my dear niece,
Our Mildred here, had never lived to thank—
As thank she will—this doughty knight of ours,
Had he not rush'd himself to save her life;
Instead of wringing nerveless, weak, white hands,
And calling out for help." "You're right!" half sigh'd
Sweet Lizzie Leigh. "Sir Oscar always looks,
Nor looks alone, but is a hero fit
For any deeds of chivalry. To-day
He rises high in all our hearts, I think."
"A dangerous state of things," half laugh'd my aunt,
And sipp'd her tea, and petted me, and talk'd
Small chit-chat just to shield me. Presently,
The little banquet over, all the guests
Went wand'ring off together, I alone,
Too shaken yet, and longing wearily
For quietude and rest, was left alone
With but a maid to tend me; tenderly
Had deft kind hands arranged the rustic couch,
In shelter'd nook of overhanging rock,

With wraps and rugs, that I might rest at ease;
And here I nestled gladly. All along
The little woodland tracks, went fluttering
The graceful drapery of ladies gay;
The happy voices floated sweetly back,
And silv'ry peals of laughter; waving plumes,
And floating scarfs, danced up and down, among
The streams of sunlight pouring through the trees.
I watch'd them far, till at the latest curve,
Where dipp'd the long wood-path, Sir Oscar turn'd
And waved his hat and parted: Ida walk'd,
I noticed, by his side in stately grace
Like some fair Grecian statue, just endow'd
With semi-human life; for chill, and hush'd,
She ever show'd; nor fright, nor joy, nor pain.
—If she did feel them—quicken'd pulse or nerve;
Or brought the rush of colour to her cheek;
Or made one eyelash quiver; ice and snow
Portray'd her outward mien, and if beneath
There burnt a Hecla quietly that might
One day outburst and devastate—none knew.
"Beauty without repose," one day observed
Sir Oscar Vivian, "has no charms for me."
"He has plenty of the two combined,

I mutter'd, in all conscience. By-and-by
The hush of evening fell in gentleness,
Through drowsy air around us ; I, fatigued,
Dropped off into deep sleep, disturb'd sometimes
By merry laugh and voices ; looking up
There stood my aunt with " Mildred, dear ! arise !
The carriage waits ; 'tis late, my love ! " Close by
Stood Oscar Vivian, and by him still,
Cold, passionless, and beautiful, with eyes
Of heavy lustre beaming down on me,
Fair Ida Leslie, asking in kind tones
If I were better ; somehow I felt vex'd ;
My nerves were doubtless tingling still ; I snapp'd
A short ungracious answer ; rose and caught
Sir Oscar's look of wonder ; took his arm
And reach'd the carriage ; then he left us, went
And saunter'd back to Ida ; took her shawl,
And join'd the walking party to the house.
My aunt was loud in eloquence and praise
Of Oscar Vivian's conduct ; chatted on
Of him and Ida Leslie all the way :
He would do well to marry her, for he
Would find no fairer lady for a wife,
And she would suit him well. " I've heard him say,

Full many a time, he liked calm dignity,
And stately full-blown beauty; yet he seems
Attracted by you too, you forest flower!
Though people say he treats you as a child,
And does but patronise, and guide your gifts
Of intellect and genius. But, dear child,
You are not faint again! you are quite white,
And wan as when you swoon'd; here, take this scent.
And—bless me! weeping? Oh! your nerves have been
Most rudely shock'd to-day; repose and rest,
For just one night, will set you right again.
Here we are, nearly home! And look, dear girl!
Over yon mead, there sits Sir Oscar low
At Ida's feet, beneath the branching elm,
Twining a wreath of flowers; and see! he looks
Up to her face for answer to some word;
He must have question'd eagerly. How fair
A tableau make the two! The rest, no doubt,
Have gone home by the lane, and—why, dear child!
You're weeping still! Come, come! I see this cave,
With all its horrors, is not to be lost
Far sight of in a day!" "Indeed!" I said,
"I own I feel dispirited, but rest
Is all I need." And we were home at last!

Was ever drive so weary and so long!
And gladly did I lay my throbbing head
Upon my pillow; gladly close my eyes,
Hoping to shut out memory and thought.

VIII.

THUS, link'd by flowers of pleasure, slipp'd away
The happy months, to merry chimes of mirth,
And silver-sounding laughter. It was late
In autumn now; the summer flowers lay pale,
Like wither'd hopes, upon the hedge-row banks;
But o'er the woods the richly broider'd robes
Of autumn flutter'd in the golden air.
And tender were the lays the wood-birds sang;
And mellow were the colours in the woods;
As if all things around in love conspired
To look as fair and lovely to the last.
My aunt had lately seemed inclined to change
Her name and state, and deign to give her hand
To an old lord, whose riches were immense,
And he still stately-looking. Thus, one day,
She being abroad with him, I saunter'd out—
Of pen and book aweary—for a walk
I lately often took. I cross'd the park,

And gain'd a winding lane, where high banks still
Were deck'd with waving ferns, and some late flow'rs
Flaunted their blooms; long trailing wreaths of hop,
With leaves and blossoms fading, clamber'd o'er
The thorn's black branches; clinging bryony
Made gay with glowing berries many a bush;
And leaves of gold and crimson flutter'd up
Like butterflies from flowers. A fence here pass'd,
I trod a little wood, where showers of leaves
Fell o'er me as I walk'd, and underneath,
The ground was strewn with them; a narrow path
Turn'd off beneath the brushwood to the left,
In summer richness hardly to be traced
For density of foliage; now 'twas free.
This following some time adown a slope,
I found myself within a shelter'd space,
So closely girdled from the northern winds
By tow'ring rocks, and op'ning on one side
Towards the south, that, like a fairy-ring,
It yet looked green and lovely, though without
Its charmed circle slow decay went on.
This—carpeted with moss, and bound around
By vines, that waved down all the shelving rocks—
Abutted on a scene, fair as the eye

E'er rested on. A terrace-path outside,
Green in mid-winter; and far down below
The deep, rich vale, where pastures full of kine
And flocks, fed calmly. Through this valley wound,
In many a graceful curve, a silver stream;
Beyond, the ground rose gently; woods flung far
Their sombre gloom; high hills tower'd and tower'd,
In tier on tier, till all the topmost range
Lay close against the sky. This spot was call'd,
From time unknown, "The Fairies' Banquet Hall."
Here, long ago, Sir Oscar had arranged
A rural party, and we danced all night
By torch and moonlight; chasing the gay hours
With feet as swift. Now, sitting musingly
Upon a moss-grown stone, I thought again—
For, say the hundredth time—of that fair night;
How Ida Leslie floated in the dance,
Like some star-queen, and with her wondrous eyes
Drew every heart to hers; how I, apart,
And hiding from Sir Reginald beneath
The clust'ring vines, beheld the homage deep
With which Sir Oscar Vivian bent before
The lovely Ida; then, as in a scroll,
I thought I read their future intertwined;

And now——My reverie was broken up
By some dark shadow falling over me;
And springing up, quite startled, I beheld
Sir Oscar smiling gently. "Pardon, pray,
O fairy-queen, this sudden ent'ring on
Your Banquet Hall, unbidden! Somehow, fate,
Or some strong pow'r, has led me blindly on
To break in on you here. And shall we not,"
He added, as I stood, "sit down awhile,
And, like wayfarers, rest within this hall,
And take the feast which nature spreads for us,
Ere, cold and calm, we seize our trusty staves,
And plod again along life's rocky way?"
"My life is all one rest," I said. He smiled,
"And what of that?" made answer. "Would you not
So have it?" "Nay, I hardly know!" I said;
"I hardly know; I sometimes fret and chafe
At this continued rest; like one who strives
To break through some deep lethargy that binds
Body and soul and spirit. Then I grieve
At my roused fancies; deem myself ingrate
To Him who giveth such good gifts to me,
Knowing myself unworthy: to no end!
The struggle, feeble sometimes, still goes on

In some sort ever. Energies, with strength
As yet untested, will assert their right
To be made use of, clam'ring for their due,
Torment and rack me; then an inward voice
Keeps preaching, 'Be content! nor wrestle thus
Against the mercy which doth hold thee safe
Within this quiet place:' but then upstarts
A mocking spirit, 'Ay!' it says, 'eat! drink!
Sleep! lapp'd in luxury, feast! dance! and sing!
Crown you with roses! make your peace with joy!
Pander to self! and cease to fret and chafe;
Nor think beyond the hour; for what to thee
Is all earth's mass of evil? Canst thou move,
By any means, the millionth part of it?
Thou, but one mote, of all the myriad motes
That dance their dance within the rays of life,
Falling from heaven athwart this atom earth;
That dance their dance, their wild, fantastic dance,
Then fall away in darkness; canst thou stay,
With thy poor words, sin's thund'ring cataract,—
Thou, but a leaf whirl'd headlong on with it?
Madness to even struggle! rest thee! rest!
Slumber, and dream! if so it pleaseth thee,
But let alone all wrestling; stronger arms,

And stouter hearts than thine grow faint, and fail ;
Grow nerveless, white, and wan, and float at last
Inert, before they sink resistlessly.' "
" Mildred ! " Sir Oscar said, and ne'er before
Had he so call'd me ; wondering I sat—
" Mildred ! my heart re-echoes all the thoughts
You tell me of your own ; it sees itself
As once it was, with all its fresh desires,
Its hopes, and aspirations ; and as well
Its doubts and temptings ; as it was, I say
Some years ago when, in a forest aisle
I met a fairy changeling, a sweet child,
Whose image ever after haunted me,
And in the tumult reigning there within,
Became impress'd, as ferns within the clay
Of long-past ages ; till a sudden chance
Struck on the vein, and lo ! it show'd out clear,
In fair distinctness. Mildred, shall I say
What my experience teaches me 'twere best
For you to do ? " " Say on ! " I said. " Say on !
I need your counsel ; give it ! I am weak,
And you are very strong." My spirit sank
With folded wings before that noble soul,
So strong, so grave, and yet, ah, me ! the while

So wondrous tender. Yes ! my spirit fell
With meekness to his feet, and felt a pride
In knowing its humility. 'Tis thus
The pride of woman glories to bend down
Unask'd, and when least thought of, low before
A soul she feels is nobler, stronger, higher,
In all things than her own. Oh, man ! oh, man !
How can you hope to bow our souls as reeds
Before you, when your petty meannesses ;
Your low-born jealousies ; your touchy pride ;
Start out and *claim* submission ! 'twere effect
Following on cause, did you but make yourselves
Worthy, in all things good, a woman's love ;
A woman's, mind you ! whose high soul is lower
But few degrees, than yours. Sir Oscar's look
Grew gravely tender, while he seem'd to pause
To shape his thoughts e'er starting ; plucking up
The fern leaves near, and scatt'ring them again
In shreds around : but then at last he spoke—
" Ah, Mildred ! in this busy world of ours
All work in some sort sometimes ; those who now
With listless eyes and hands look heedless on
Will, just when the Great Master shall think fit,
Uprouse, and throw aside their cumbrous robes

Sloth-girdled; brace themselves, and to their task
In the stupendous work. It were far best—
Forgive me, Mildred!—if in this rest-time,
You gather strength, and vigour, for the work
You needs must do ere long: believe it too,
This time of rest a blessing; you are young
To battle with the world—I pray that work
May not be yours, dear child! Yes! you have need
Of all this rest, or it were never given;
Besides, rest is not idleness; one work
Is yours e'en now—to glean, and garner up,
All knowledge needed in your growing art
To bring it to perfection; you but know
A very little yet; learn! learn alway!
Gather, as bees do, sweets from ev'ry flower
Whence spiders suck but poison. Nature talks
In parables and emblems; fathom them!
Then turn them to account; possess, apply,
Read them to others, numberful. Art is,
High art, is nature's wise interpreter.
Study it! learning *ever*, teach *sometimes*,
After full wisdom cometh. Ask of God
Guidance and inspiration; then write, child!
As for the mocking spirit, turn aside

Nor heed its dictates. Does the violet,
The very first, make spring? Or does the dew,
The drop of dew one lily-bell hoards up,
Refresh all earth? Or is yon stream,
So eagerly pursuing still its way,
Essential to the ocean? Never mind!
They do their part: the spring would come, 'tis true,
Without the violet; the drop of dew
By the next breeze may be out-scatter'd far
Upon a senseless stone; the ocean deep
Swells not one drop, we see, towards its brim
For that small stream's small tribute: but did all
Sweet flowers forget to open to the spring;
Their cups refuse to treasure up the dew;
Streams turn aside, and pour their little gifts,
Because they are so little, over rocks;
And all in nature follow its own way
And so be rebels, saying, they were sure
Their tiny help was needless, and could be
On no account required; what then, think you,
Would happen next? Why must not nature faint,
And presently die out? Well, then! apply
This vein of argument to other things.
Ah! every word of truth that lips can frame;

And every thought—though rough and angular—
Within the humblest heart, is yet a part
Of that great fount, which one day surely shall
Burst its kept bounds, and flood the universe,
And make it all one paradise, where sin
Shall have no part. You, Mildred, I, and all,
Have need to commune with these hearts of ours,
And keep them to the truth; it matters not
Though but one deed, one word, one thought of truth,
We do, or say, or harbour; let it be
But earnest truth, 'twill go to swell the tide
Of that great flood; 'twill weaken by that much
The mass of loathsome evil; though while here
We may not see its working. Let us think
Our smallest efforts, howsoever small,
Are needed, in the wise economy
Of God's great plan for us; so at the last,
In small things true, we shall perforce attain
By slow steps up to greater; for we know,
Once on that road, we need but earnestness
To some time reach the goal. But, pardon me!
If I have taken too much on myself
In speaking thus to you: think only, pray,
That I at least am anxious overmuch,

It may be, for your welfare every way,
And fain would see you perfected in all."
My heart was very full, I could not speak,
Nor raise my head, and drawing near he said,
"You are not angry, Mildred?" and he stoop'd
And, as a father might, he raised my head
And look'd into my eyes, where, spite of me,
Some tears were gath'ring: then a flush went up
Like glow of sunset o'er his solemn face,
And "It is well!" he murmur'd to himself,
And as he turn'd aside I heard him say,
As if to his own heart, "Not yet! not yet!
No! she must love me more! I pine for it,
As does the night for morning." Coming back,
He took my hand, and drew it close within
His own strong arm, and pointing to the sun—
"We must not tarry longer, let us go!
The day is fast declining, and the mist
Is curling slowly from the river up,
And like a round red moon, the sun looks down
His last upon the vale. See! yonder hill
Has donn'd a veil of purple edged with gold:
And all along, a thousand points of red
Gleam out against the sky; how many days

Of happiness, I wonder, will show pure,
Like yonder flecks of light, when I shall stand
Upon life's bound'ry, looking back upon
The way my steps have trodden?"

IX.

Oh! lady, do you think that, after all,
There is such thing as Time, as measured by
Our arbitrary rules? else why do days
Prove hours sometimes, hours days? Why do we live
A lifetime of delight in one brief hour?
Anguish in seconds, which, if lengthen'd out,
Would a whole lifelong torment? Is there Time?
Well there may be, but it can only rule
Our perishable bodies. Years, months, weeks—
What are they to the soul? Nay! mind outbursts
The petty bounds they set, and revels will
Whole cycles, unenthrall'd, while we but sit
With calm, and vacant gaze, and calmly note
Once round the dial-plate Time's finger moves.
And what is time to love? His rosy wing
Sweeps like a sunflash by, our hearts upleap
Exultant with delight, pass through dear joys,
me bright place beyond time's narrow span,

That here had lit long ages. Let it be
A question for philosophers; I know
Some mete out that, we needs must still call time,
By their own rules; existing weary months
In weeks of time, and then again they live,
In life's full meaning, years in some brief days.
But, stay! I wrote of that autumnal time—
What next? Why need I tell you that I loved?
Like as we love but once upon this earth,
Once in a lifetime, once, and then we die.
Yes! man may love, and love again, and live;
And go his way, and dig, and delve, and turn
His face towards the sunset of his love
With a half-glad, half-pitiful farewell!
Nor greatly miss it, when the black cloud-banks
Loom up before its splendour; he has work
Demanding his full energies; no time
For sentiment is left him; his the world
Spread out before to act in, and he acts;
Somewhat more sad at first, but evermore
Finding another passion—power, gain, name—
With which to fill the void the old one left.
With woman 'tis not so! We love sometime,
Or soon, or later, once supremely well:

We may have fancied that we loved before;
Or boasted ourselves love-proof, till there comes
This one life-passion o'er us, and we live,
Live lifelong by it; or we die by it;
Or living die a daily death, mid life
That is but an existence, cold, grey, void;
Empty of that which is a woman's life—
Love! making home and happiness. Oh, love!
Delicious love! that ever like glad streams,
Form'd from the dew from heaven above, glide down
The mountain side, and singing as they go,
Bring life and verdure to the pining herbs.
Delicious love! that like a rosy mist
Settles on all things, and behold they take
At once the semblance of the loveliest.
Each harsher angle, jutting outline, point
All jagged, rounded to soft graceful curves,
Swelling in full-form'd beauty. Let me sing,
And linger yet upon those happy days!
I was as one who wanders in a dream,
Within some vale, down which the roseate mists
Come slowly deep'ning from the east; gold darts
Strike all the fire out from the diamond dews,
Dusky-robed night let fall from breast, and brow,

And rounded arm, in flying from the dawn ;
Then slowly walking upward, lo ! the glow
Deepens, and trembles, dazzling, till the soul
Entering amid, it lacks identity ;
Leaves form and fashion, melts, and fuses down
To golden, glowing liquid essence, which
In waves of quicken'd life arise, and fall,
And lap themselves upon the shores of heaven.
Dawn deepens into day ; the throbbing mist
Goes slowly floating upward, and again
The angles, and the jutting crags and rocks,
Their own harsh outlines take again—nay, more—
They gain in harshness by the contrast shown
Through mem'ry of the scarcely parted past.
My aunt was now absorb'd in her own love,
Being the fair affianced of my lord ;
All things progressing for her wedding I,
One of the many bridesmaidens to be ;
And after that return to my own home.
Meantime went on our usual gaieties
With their unceasing, senseless round. One day,
One golden day in autumn's loveliest time
Of Indian summer ; just when ruddy-ripe
The berries hang upon the russet thorn ;

And scarlet shreds, Virginian vines cast forth
To mingle with the mellow tints of grape,
And yellow of the passion-flower's rich plum;
Just when the robin's note is mellowest,
'Twixt summer's shrilly joy, and winter's wail,
And all his breast has caught its ruddiest glow;
Some enterprising gentlemen proposed
One other water-picnic—floating down
Our little river with the tide, to stroll
Upon a distant beach, where silver sand
Kept rare and fragile shells; cull what we would;
Lunch at the village; to our boat again,
And home to dine. Awearied of all joys,
Our guests caught at the notion. "Ocean-Bird"
Was launch'd and quickly tenanted; our flag
Floated in azure silk, with sea-gull spread,
Broad-wing'd, upon it at our little mast:
And habited in pretty boating suits,
With jaunty sailor hats, and anchor belts,
Cables, and blocks, and buoys, for jewelry.
We, pleased with self, and so well pleased with all,
Push'd from the shore, and floated with the tide
Down 'twixt the sedgy banks. The tall flag-leaves
Flutter'd and rustled in the freshing breeze;

The golden-rod and bulrush nodded, glad,
And willow branches held long slender hands,
Up from the river-wave, to beckon us;
The little wavelets backward laughing ran,
When they had plash'd our boat, to fling themselves
In frolic on the sward; the creamy track
We left behind us froth'd to nothingness;
The river smooth'd itself to glass again,
And held no traces more. We, merrily
Sang boating-songs, and cheery madrigals,
Ida and Oscar, Lizzie Leigh and I;
With chorus from the others; dropping down
Swiftly and silently—as love draws love—
Out to the great, glad sea. The salt spray came
Fresh on our lips; and, sea-bird like, our boat
Flew through the foam-wreath, nestling lovingly
Amid the waters, dancing o'er the waves,
And frolicking among them daintily,
Made ever on her way. We near'd the shore,
Sprang out upon the silver-sanded bay,
And wander'd where we listed. Bold, high rocks,
Catching the noonday sun, reflected back
Brightness and warmth enough; and sunny nooks,
Made for gay lingerers, beguiled our steps,

Ever to stray and wander. One of these,
Heading a mimic cove, attracted me,
And climbing up I hid myself away
For merriment, to puzzle all the rest,
Behind a jutting crag. There taking out
Sketch-book and pencil, forthwith I began
To draw the view around me: quite absorbed,
I noticed not that all the sounds had ceased,
Till, when my sketch completed, I peer'd out
From hiding-place, and saw no creature near.
Piqued that Sir Oscar sought me not, I plann'd
A small revenge, though still it cost me tears.
I would not go to them, I would remain
Still hidden, were it even for some hours;
And once again I sketched, the distant shore
With fisher-boats affording ample theme;
And well content, I rapidly work'd on,
Till voices nearing, roused me: Lizzie Leigh
Talking to Ida. Quietly I sat,
Thinking they sought me. Lizzie Leigh spoke, "Yes!
I really think Sir Oscar ought to speak,
After such mark'd attention; I detest
All danglers; were I you I would not bear
This indecision longer." Ida gave

A very audible and ugly sneer
And bitter laugh at that. "Dear child!" she said,
"You pretty innocent! why, don't you know,
I mean that man to marry me some day?"
Then Lizzie, quite astonished,—"But you can't,
Unless he wills it, Ida; and they say
Lady Mulgrave intends him for her niece,
And Mildred's nothing loth." "Please, dear child,"
Again said Ida, "I will hear no more
Of this wild nonsense! just as if a man,
Gifted with such rare gifts, and weary quite
Of all that rank and wealth can give, would choose
A little pert, conceited country miss;
A would-be poetess, with maudlin thoughts
Of life and love; with milk-and-water views
Of fashion and society; and dreams
Misty and vague of claims position has;
And sickly, baby-notions of all things
We, who are well-born gentlwomen, know
Are vital to our class; pshaw! Lizzie, *he*
To mate with *her*! 'tis folly! I have said,
And mean it, I shall have him for myself.
"But, Ida"—hesitating, Lizzie said—
"But, Ida! only think, if Mildred loves

Sir Oscar, 'twould be terrible to her;
And who knows but she does." "You foolish child,"
Coldly laugh'd Ida back, "to think that love
Has anything to do with marriage now,
In our high rank of life! Leave that to Tom
The groom, and pretty Fan the kitchen-maid.
As to this Mildred Gower, depend on it
She is too redolent of rustic life;
You note her healthy colouring, too coarse
For perfect, high-cast beauty, e'er to pine
Or waste away in love. Love! love indeed!
She knows no more about it than"——But here
The voices died in distance, quite away.
Yes! blame me, it was wrong to listen; yet
Unconsciously at first I did so, then
'Twas past my power to move; an icy hand
Seem'd press'd upon my heart, to stay its beat;
And all my life seem'd ebbing. Was this true,
That which I heard, or a wild, unreal dream
To be aroused from? or a silly joke?
Nay, 'twas reality! an earnest game
By a most practised player for high stakes,
Who could not fail to win, where'er she chose
To dare her desp'rate fate. But, never mind!

What thoughts reel'd headlong through my puzzled brain,
Ever chased out by others. Down below,
Sir Oscar's self, with others, call'd aloud
Imploringly to me,—my drap'ry show'd
My hiding-place at last—"Come down!" they said,
"The tide is flowing inward, and the rocks
Are almost cover'd, making our escape
Each moment now less easy. Come at once!"
I hurried to obey them, scrambled down,
Met grave rebuke in Oscar's speaking eye,
And pouted back rebellion, noticed not
In that exacting moment, for the tide
Had flow'd above our narrow pass-way, round
One jutting rock, and nothing could be done
But wade on through it. Lingering behind
One moment, with grave looks, and pointing on
To yet another headland, more submerged,
The gentlemen consulted; then came near
Sir Oscar hurriedly, and caught me up,
Without one word, and dash'd through plashing waves,
The others following closely. Fain would I
Have slipped from all the shelter of his arms
And hid me in the waters; bitter tears

Would wet my cheek, which looking down he saw,
And seeing, judged fear-wrung. "Nay, child, why
weep?
Know you not you are safe while life and strength
Are mine to save you?" Then, as tears choked back
My falt'ring answer, we were on the sand,
And, all the others joining us, we ran
To quickly gain the other point; but there,
Our boatmen noting our dilemma, brought
Our pretty "Ocean-Bird." We took, right glad,
Our places to turn homeward. Ida look'd
Calm and unruffled; queenly, cold and grave,
As usual; not a trace in eye or brow,
In attitude or bearing, to denote
The desp'rate game she plann'd. Sir Oscar took
His station close beside me, gave his hand
To help in Ida, who, with graceful ease,
Sat down beside him carelessly, and smiled—
Yes! really smiled; a rarity for her—
Benignly down, congratulating me
On being safe at last; and pitied me
For all the pleasant afternoon I miss'd,
Et cetera, et cetera; to which
I answer'd nothing. Wond'ringly, then turn'd

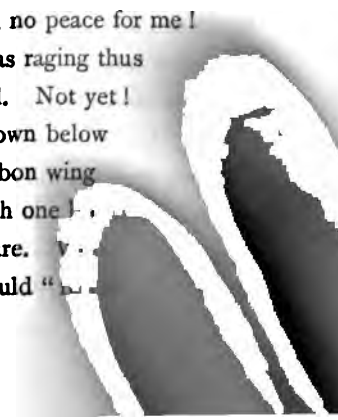
Sir Oscar, questioning with speaking eye
The meaning of my mood; and I gave back
A vapid, meaningless, cold look, which sent
The vex'd blood to his temples. Ida's voice
Fell sweetly as a silver bell, to call
His notice to some passing scenes, and then
Held him in earnest converse all along
That shining river, which was dark'ning now,
And growing weird and ghostly in the gloom—
A long and shining serpent, crawling on
And bearing us afar into the mist,
Looming ahead, it seem'd. Grey vapours fell
Chillingly over us, and silence dropp'd
Slowly, with folded wings, upon our boat,
Cutting the tide but ling'ringly; my heart
Was grey and cold, and brooded, with the mist,
Above its stream of love, whose river-song
Pierced in full wail up through it. Suddenly
The frail boat grounded on a sunk mud-bank,
Round which we should have steer'd to keep the stream
Flowing amid our grounds. My aunt sprang up,
Endang'ring boat and occupants; my lord
Prevail'd on her to calm herself; the rest
Utter'd quick little shrieks, and would have rush'd

In helter-skelter anywhere, had land
But offer'd for their footsteps; as it was
Sir Oscar and Lord Doncaster work'd hard,
And with the boatmen, pushed the boat afloat,
And once more we were free. Just then a scarf
Dropp'd down into the river, from the neck
Of Ida Leslie; stretching out her hand,
She made to grasp it, as the boat lurch'd round,
And in the sudden swing, lost balance, fell,
With one wild frantic shriek, and flinging high
Her arms above her head, sunk instantly
Like lead from our dazed sight! A moment—plash!
One had leapt overboard—Sir Oscar—quick
Striking out for the circles where she fell;
One upward look he turn'd, where far I lean'd
Over the boat with eager outstretch'd arms
Mutely beseeching his return. He smiled
Calmly and reassuringly, and breathed
A low-voiced warning—"Mildred, child! take care!
God bless you!" Then a floating object caught
His eagle eye, and making for it, lo!
It just escaped his grasp, and sank once more,
Silently now. We watch'd him strike out quick,
And in the mist lost both. Oh, agony!

We sobb'd and wail'd in concert, all the sad,
And tender-hearted freight: the men rose up
And bent expectant eyes, and ready hands,
For that they said was coming—I—I stood,
Nor weeping nor bemoaning—ice and iron
Were on my heart and brain. A shout, though faint,
A shout ahead, "Pull yonder, pull!" I cried.
They pull'd as for their lives, and reach'd the bank
Where, one arm thrown around a willow-tree,
The other holding Ida, stood, waist-high
In mud and water, Oscar, sorely tried
To keep the lifeless burden which he held
Head-high from water. Now, I know not how,
But they were in the boat, and we were quick
With every means at hand, to hasten back
The life to Ida's pulses. "Dead!" they said,
"Assuredly she's dead!" and there she lay,
As statue cut in alabaster white
By some famed Grecian's chisel; proudly yet
The cold lips curl'd, and all the haughty curves
Of passionless, calm nostril, throat, and face
Were kept unsoften'd; back from icy brow,
In long black masses, trail'd her loosen'd hair,
Streaming like matted sea-weed. River nymp

She seemed, laid out for burial, borne away
By human hands, to give to mother earth.
On went our sadden'd party, rowing on,
Our awful burden, lifeless still. We shot
Rapidly down the stream; touch'd land; sprang out;
Sent fleetest messengers before, and made
A bier of oars and cushions, laid thereon
The still unconscious Ida; bore her quick
Up to the house, where, tenderly and long,
All art was used to rouse her. I saw well
Sir Oscar's troubled look as, ling'ring still,
He sent for news of her again, before
He could be made to think of self and take
The care his state required: I noted well,
And made my inward comments. "Nothing new,
Sir Oscar!" was the message. "None can say
If life will yet return." He went at that,
Not even heeding my beseeching look
Pleading for word or glance. I rush'd at last,
Heart-sick and crouching, down at Ida's door,
Listen'd, and watch'd, and waited; ear and eye
Strain'd to intense acuteness. Muffled sounds
Of wordless voices; hurried steps; confused,
Ambiguous questionings; all answerless,

There seem'd within, till came a firmer tread,
And some one near'd from inward; open'd quick
The door, and almost stumbled over me;
Then lifting up my bow'd head from my hands,
Sir Oscar's glance met mine. His face was set
And ashen white; unearthly large and bright
Gleam'd his dark eyes, as with a knitted brow
He raised me up, and answering the words—
The voiceless words—that died upon my lips,
He said, "'Tis hopeless! Ida Leslie's dead!
Now to your room, and rest!" And prompt and firm,
He pass'd his arm around me, drew me down
The lobby; open'd silently my door;
Motion'd me forward; bow'd and shut me in;
In with my agony—to "rest," he said.
"Rest!" Mockery! no rest, no peace for me!
Not while the war of doubt was raging thus
Within my heart so horror full. Not yet!
While in that awful stillness down below
Death brooded over life, on ebon wing
That lifted not, nor ruffled with one
Nor rustled, presaging departure.
Though but unfeeling clay, could "



In the supreme intensity of doubt
Unfathom'd, such as this? Night fell; full dark;
Starless and moonless; shadows came, and crouch'd
Low on the floor, and beckon'd warningly
Out of the misty distance; drizzling rain
Blotted the windows; something, shapeless, spread,
Lengthen'd, and fill'd with creeping horror all
The space around; something, but palpable
To the awed soul alone. My chill'd blood froze;
My heart stood still ice-glazed; my pulses ceased;
And, crisping up my brain, fear's blast rush'd cold;
Then, falling prone, came blindness—silence—death.
Nay! voices roused me presently. My aunt,
Bathing my temples, smiled above me; light,
Warmth, and love, now greeted me: kind care
Restored crush'd nature. "I have news, dear child!"
My aunt said, tenderly. "Poor Ida lives!
Has, after hours of patient efforts made,
And countless remedies, revived; is now
Sleeping in quiet ease, and needs henceforth
But ordinary care to be again,
In some few days, quite well. The doctor says
Her nature, unimpressionable, stands
No fear of suffering from what would be

A shock quite hopeless to a sensitive .
And nervously strung temperament. Why you,
Poor child, seem to have suffer'd, as it is,
Far more than she has." Then administ'ring
Some soothing draught, she call'd the maids away,
And tenderly embracing me, sigh'd low
A sweet "Good-night! sleep sweetly, child, and rise
Your own bright self to-morrow," and away.
"To-morrow!" moan'd I, wearily, I turn,
With doubts unscann'd by light of truth, to brood
On what has been to-day. Ah, doubt! doubt! doubt!
Hell-born, and devil-bred! the lowest depths
Of darkness yawn'd asunder, as malform'd
You crawl'd, a slimy monster, to less gloom;
And, where your loathsome coils, all serpentine,
Could not be traced in full, lay hinting at
Horrible things to be, and details vile.
Reason made vapid efforts, and fell low,
Crush'd out, beneath your folds; faith, struggling hard,
Succumb'd at last; hope, wailing, soar'd above
On silver wing gloom-shaded; love alone
Battled, and struggled desp'rately—now down,
Now up again; now sorely press'd; now faint,
Under that slimy monster, writhing mad

In agonies of torture. Would no ray,
From truth's high heaven, pierce through the ebon gloom
And slay the reptile with its lightning flash?
Not yet! the heart that opens to let in
Suspicion first, however weak, must hold,
Ere long, doubt statureful, and all doubt's crew
Of lawless torturers; must feel them prey
Upon its warmth and life; its peace and rest;
Until 'tis eaten out, and gnaw'd away
To but a husk; and shell of its own self.
Pray, love! on bended knees with shield of faith,
And hope's shaft ready pointed against doubt:
Pray! nor inactive rest, not e'en in prayer,
But fight the devil-born, and conquer him.

X.

As spring to flowers; as sunrise unto earth;
As light to waking eyes; came back again
The life we counted lost. Yes! Ida rose,
Calm, passionless, and self-possess'd, and came
Amongst us much as usual: it might be
There was a deeper shadow 'neath her eye,
A slightly loosen'd tension of the mouth;
But brow, and cheek, and lip, were arch'd and curved
In their own perfect beauty, whence the bloom
Was neither brush'd nor ruffled. It was said
She never after spoke of, or allow'd
Another to make mention of, that day,
With all its dreadful horrors. How she met
Sir Oscar is recorded; I was there,
And talking with him, when she enter'd in;
Came calmly up, gave him her firm white hand,
With graceful, quiet greeting of "Good morn!"
Remark'd upon the weather; took a book;

And sinking carelessly upon a couch,
Close by the fire, turn'd it leaf by leaf,
Descanting on the merits of the prints,
And toying with her rings. Sir Oscar look'd
Impatiently, it seem'd to me, and came
Rapidly back, and begg'd me to go out
Into the garden with him; here Ida turn'd
Her cold face round, and look'd, but spoke no word;
And out we went. Sir Oscar walk'd along
In silence some brief time; then commented
On what lay close around—the trees, the shrubs,
The dying vines,—and made sweet parables
Out of them all to tell me. "There," said he,
"See yonder!" as we pass'd the greenhouse by,
"That white camellia in its stately pride,
Cold and unruffled, howsoe'er the wind
May toss and tumble other frailer flowers,
Ever the same; its petals all uncurl'd;
Its hue as spotless still; but scentless quite,
And meaningless its beauty. Who, now guess,
I think of, looking on it?" "Nay!" I said;
"Who knows? I cannot guess; or if I could,
I would not; choosing rather you should tell,
And finish out your simile." "You know!"

He said, and look'd low down into my eyes.
"Why, Ida Leslie; 'tis her perfect type:
A faultless form, but lacking utterly
The perfume sweet—the tender woman's heart—
To make it precious, loving, lovable.
I pity from my soul the man who wins
Her cold white hand; if he expects to find
Change or variety, quick impulse in
Her moods, or warm and gen'rous feeling in
Her nature, he will look and yearn in vain;
And, if he love her, rush to sin, or turn
Into a stern, sour'd man; and if it be
He loves her not, he'll rush to sin the more,
And sneer in his own heart at woman-kind,
And hold his way apart. Heartless and cold
And vapid-soul'd is Ida. What think you?"
I did not speak; a moment I stood still;
For, in that lightning-flash of truth, doubt lay
A dead mass, which my heart, with one wild bound,
Cast out for ever. I was radiant
In all that light, and heeded not of aught
Without and round about us, till his voice
Awoke me, and I, starting, saw him bend
A searching look of half-amused reproach

Upon me. "Ah!" he utter'd, slow and clear,
"I thought so! Henceforth, Mildred, doubt no more!
Your own doubt is your punishment." And then
He chang'd his voice and mien, and talk'd of much
Concerning books and poetry, and touch'd
On his pet theory—the Israelites;
Their sin, and wanderings; their hiding-place;
The consummation of all prophecy
Connected with them; their ingathering,
And final restoration to their loved
And lost Jerusalem. He look'd and spoke,
Methought, as godly men of old, inspired
And sent on earth of God. "And is it true,"
I hesitating questioned, "what they say
You really think of us,—that we are one,
One and the same, we English people now,
With long-lost Israel?" "Why not?" he said,
"Is there on earth a nation, save ourselves,
Favoured by God, upheld of Him, and made
A blessing to the heathen; carrying
Salvation to the utmost bounds of earth,
And on her borders tracing words of strength
None shall gainsay or alter?—is it given
Unto another people, save ourselves,

To arbitrate, 'twixt mightier powers than ours;
Dictate to empires; vanquish 'whelming foes;
Gather the outcasts in from all far lands;
Grow rich in merchandise from every port;
Loosen all chains of slavery; stand up
With an all-powerful 'So let it be,' to
Great world-wide questions, and it is so; send
Handfuls of men 'gainst thousands forth to fight,
And see them come back victors. Where is there
Another nation doing all of this
Besides our own? Find me that one, and I
Will yield the point, or hesitate at least
To come to a decision; as it is—
These being all conditions of the lost
And hidden people Israel, and we
Alone of all the peoples known on earth,
Living in the fulfilment of the same—
I, having read, and studied carefully
That which is written on the question, turn,
Hot from the reading, and declare it is,
It must be true! that we, the English folk,
Are Israelites, the long-time lost ten tribes!"
"You startle me," I falter'd; "are we then
Jews, you and I and all o[illegible] h! there

You rush head foremost mid the usual fault.
Jews? No! they are the two tribes, wandering
Amongst us in all countries visibly;
A people known, and recognised as such;
Bearing distinctive traits, unalter'd mid
Ages of trial and exile. Never *lost*,
Living well-known amongst us. Not so we,
We who are Israelites unknowingly;
We have been hidden away, and long time lost;
Lost to the world; the Jews their brethren, lost
Out of all times, all peoples; lost, unknown,
Even to our own selves, and now at length,
In these last days, but dimly seeing through
Our slow awakening, the glories set
In our full view, to be our own sometime
When the full day bursts on us." "Tell me now,"
I eagerly demanded, with the glow
From his enthusiasm kindling
Like feeling in my heart, "Tell me, I pray!
Who? when? and how? these wondrous thoughts you broach,
Have first made known and foster'd? Where may I
Learn more and much of this? Dazzled, benumb'd,
I cannot comprehend, or understand

Avow'd it—the best way ever—and then went
A convert, not half-hearted, opened-eyed,
To this grand theory.—Sped on those days,
Full orbed with love, and sunn'd by happiness,
To lulling hymnals of the rosy hours,
And incense-wreaths of pleasure's offering,
On to the—what?—all things,
All thoughts, all times, all nature, have a goal;
All hopes, all happiness, all love, an end;
Beauty, youth, life, a death. One morn
I rose with something pressing down my heart,
A something nameless in its misery,
And unaccountable. The eve before
Had pass'd as happily as all the rest,
Nay! somewhat more so! pass'd in converse free
With kind, good friends, Sir Oscar, and a few
Of our most brilliant visitors. We sang,
Danced, laugh'd, and chatted merrily; and plann'd
A large exploring party for next day
To view a distant Abbey; then good-night!
Was lightly said, Sir Oscar, laughingly,
In spirits quite unusual, stole away
The autumn violets I wore, and quick
Turn'd him, and went. But now this morn, 'twas vain!

I could not tell whence came the shade o'er me:
But while I ponder'd letters came, and one
As usual from my mother, and alas!
'Twas bitter in its import. "Come!" she wrote,
"My child, and give us comfort! we are stricken
It seems of God and man. Your father lies
Upon a bed of sickness, beaten down
By sudden news, that all our maintenance
Was lost for ever; this is sad enough,
But were he but restored, I would not care,
Though forced to work for bread; forgive me, dear!
That thus I break up all your happiness;
I fain would leave you in your luxury,
But pine for your sweet presence; it may be
Our God will still be gracious, and restore
You dear loved parent." Lady! you may guess
My grief the best, who know me best; let be!
I roused a storm of passions in my aunt,
By starting up, and saying I should go
That day, that hour. "It is impossible!"
She angrily replied; "I cannot spare
My horses and my carriages: you know
My lord and all the others come at twelve
For this excursion; you must stay besides

To be my bridesmaid; how can I account
For your strange absence?" I scarce made reply,
But gather'd up my things, and hurried down
Again to say good-bye; but very stern
Grew her clear eye, as putting back my hand,
She would not say farewell. "Oh, aunt!" I cried,
"My heart is full to bursting, add no more
To its great burden, or it then must break;
I love you so, I cannot leave you thus,
Being not all ungrateful for the care
And love you shower on me; let us but kiss,
And part dear friends!" But when my aunt was stern
I knew she never yielded, and she pass'd
With but a cold "good-morning!" tho' I caught
Her hand and kiss'd it warmly; then I snatch'd
Some flowers that lay beside me, hiding them
Beneath my dress-folds—*he* had given them me
But few hours back—and hurried through the hall,
And down the steps, and went, and at the hour
I should have seen Sir Oscar, I was clasp'd
By trembling, nerveless hands, close to the heart
Of my beloved mother; when I raised
My eyes to hers, I needed all my will
To force down the great cry that all but burst

From my affrighted heart: so worn, so pale,
So full of meek long-suff'ring, was the face
I left so calm, and full of health and peace.
But this was less than, spite of all her care,
The shock I felt, when entering with her
My father's darken'd chamber, I beheld
That dear, revered, beloved one stretch'd out—
Oh, Lady—pale and speechless, paralysed.
I see him yet as I beheld him then—
His noble features thinn'd and spiritual;
His forehead traced with added lines of care,
Since last I saw him, and the large loose locks
Of soft black hair, with many silver threads
I never saw before, toss'd o'er his head:
Within his open eyes a vacancy
Terrible in its blankness; and the hands,
So thin and helpless now, stretch'd nervelessly
Upon the snowy sheet.—There! there! cry heart!
Let burst your anguish e'er I record more—
——————— Oh, loving God!
Forgive me! that I, basking in the sun
Of luxury and ease, abandon'd them—
My father and my mother—to the care
And kindliness of hirelings! Days, and nights,

I watch'd my father fading; striving hard
To lessen by all means the weight of woe
My own beloved mother stagger'd 'neath.
Strangers came to and fro beneath our roof,
Clamm'ring to see my father; hard, stern, men
Whose whole lives were a long contending for
The lust and gain of gold. I battled long
With all of them, I begg'd, I pray'd—for what?
Only for time, that death might do its work
Before we turn'd out homeless in the world,
And they might take our pretty home and all,
And, like coarse ravens, quarrel o'er the prey,
As they thought fit. They heard me patiently,
And after much delay, accorded me
The poor request. Our dear old pastor came
And soothed with blessed words those last sad days
Of my lov'd father's life. We three alone
Sat round his dying bed: but one of all
Our hired domestics, in our hour of need,
Remain'd to us; the rumour quickly spread
That we were ruin'd, and most wisely they
Sought shelter elsewhere. I had written twice
To tell my aunt of all this misery,
d now some three weeks after this, there came

A brief, cold note of sympathy, in which
She blamed anew my mother, for what she
Was pleased to call "her want of providence,
In marrying a man with such small means;"
Wonder'd I wrote so sadly; hoped to hear
Things had been settled pleasantly;
And then no doubt my father soon would be
Quite well again, being still in the prime
And strength of manhood; then at last there came
A name I thrill'd at—"Oscar Vivian
Is haughtier than ever in his mien;
I fancy he is piqued at your abrupt
And sudden flitting, having never call'd
Once since you left; when we do meet, he bows
Stiffly, and passes on; but pray, my dear!
Don't fancy him a man to pine away
For any lady fair; he makes himself
Almost a home at 'Oaklands'—Leslie bought
That manor since you left, a long way hence,
Where now they live, and so we rarely meet—
And Ida, people say, is quite in love
With this stilt-walking hero, sometime since
Your most devoted beau, and he, of course,
Will condescend to come down from the clouds,

And take this lovely heiress; truth to tell!
He seems by no means loath; but, niece of mine!
Had you but play'd your cards as cleverly
As Ida does you might have been—but there!
What use to write of that? you met, it seems,
In cloudland for a time, now on the earth
Your paths diverge; though I must say I thought
You really cared for him; but I suppose
You are the desp'rate flirt some loving friends
Are pleased to call you; if so, I believe
You met your match in Oscar Vivian;
For none could seem your more devoted swain,
And now forsooth he's Ida's." Down I dash'd
That cruel letter; tore, and trampled it;
And albeit though not given to passion, fell
In bitter sobbings on my little bed,
Writhing in keenest torture; faint, and worn,
Nature could bear no more, and sleep seal'd up
My heavy eyes. 'Twas high noon when I woke,
My mother stood beside me, bitter tears
Pouring adown her cheeks; I started up
And clasp'd her. "Is he worse?" I faintly ask'd.
"Alas! I fear so! Come!" And hurriedly
We enter'd that still chamber, where alone

Our pastor stood beside the dear one's bed,
Wiping away the death-damps. Few hours more
The setting sun pour'd golden lustre in
Upon us, as we knelt, and glory shed
Around his head, whose eyes were closed for aye
To all earth's beauties. Lady ! he was dead !
Some time pass'd by in woe's first bitter burst,
And then recall'd to everyday details
By my pale mother's pleading, speechless face,
I roused myself to work. The luxury
Of calm, inactive grief, the poor know not;
They in their deepest agony must work;
Even around the dying, following up
Their daily labour, for the daily wants
Which crave supplying, clamm'ring for their dues,
No matter how the soul is prostrated.
I deem'd it right to send my fair aunt word
Of our deep loss; but though long combating
What yet was pride, could no how bring myself,
Till at the last, to humbly ask her aid;
I might have spared myself the humbling though
For all the help it brought: her answer came
Long after from the sunny south of France,
Where she was on her happy wedding tour,

The gayest of the gay. "'Tis sad!" she wrote,
"To hear of death at any time, but now,
When I am so elated, it quite throws
Gloom on my brightness; really! I had given
My ruby set, to have been spared the news
Till my return. However, I am vex'd,
My niece, for you, and poor Lenore; pray, give
My fondest love to her, and by-and-by,
I hope to help you; but just now, my dear,
It is indeed impossible: of course
I felt it due to my estate to launch
Rather more freely out; and what with gems
Reset, and new; a splendid diamond cross,
I order'd after one the Duchess wore;
My trousseau, certainly a splendid one,
In character with my new dignity;
And—well! a thousand other things, just now
I have no ready money, I can spare.
Why not make use of your poetic gifts?"
And so on, in the same cold, heartless strain
Unto the end. Oh, fluttering butterfly!
I bitterly exclaimed; "Oh, weak, gay thing!
For ever buzzing round the world's sweet flowers;
Will nothing find its way beneath the ice

That must encrust your heart! will nothing touch
Its tender core, and make it sympathise
With sadness, and with suffering? Cold! hard!
This to a niece and sister lying low
Amid the dregs of sorrow! It is well!
My mother shall not eat of doled-out bread
E'en from a sister given grudgingly.
I needs must work; I'll act upon the hint
And write for money; it maybe, perhaps,
Though yet so poor my verses, they may win
Bread to sustain the feeble, sunless life
In two poor women.

XI.

THE day for burying my father came;
A dull, grey, sunless day; so solemn, dim
And noiseless, that it seemed the very earth,
Chill'd into silence had forgot to go
On its accustom'd track. My mother lay
In prostrate grief within a distant room;
And in the evening, seeing that she slept,
I left her with the maid, and crept away
Through garden walks, and enter'd unobserved
The quiet grave-yard; kneeling by the grave
Where they had lain him low, my hush'd-up grief
Burst out in all its violence; no sound
Disturb'd the air, save my soul-rending sobs;
And stretch'd out there I know not how time flew,
Till from the great church clock the full strokes fell
Like dull blows on my brain; snow-flakes dropp'd
Over me as I lay; when I arose
My limbs refused their office; kneeling there

With heart-felt fervour then I pour'd my prayer
Into His ear Who ever hears, and lo!
A sudden gentle calm came o'er my soul—
A pow'r I trembled 'neath, hush'd up my grief,
And rising strong, and comforted, I knew
The Father Everlasting sheltered us—
The widow and the orphan—in His arms,
And we should, presently, in His good time,
Arise, and sing rejoicing. After that
Our pastor managed for us. Good old man!
He would have taken us to his own home,
And given us food and shelter: but I saw
The project pain'd my mother, who could not
Yet bring herself to live on charity;
So, quietly, within a little cot,
Down a long, flow'ry lane, we made our home,
Our pastor fitting it with everything
He, in his tender care, conceived that we
Should need; and by the same untiring care,
My mother and myself begun a school
For little village maidens. It at first
Was wondrous strange, this working for ourselves:
The little merry troop of maidens came
And look'd with round, bright eyes, quite wond'ringly

At the pale, gentle lady in her weeds
Of recent widowhood, who, few months back,
Was Lady Bountiful to all that place,
But now was suddenly brought down to teach
Their little chubby hands to ply with care
The busy needle; turn their giddy heads
To learn all useful knowledge, fit for use,
In daily walk, of humble village life.
And now the strain and tension, being gone,
Which held me up through all that dreadful time,
Like a loosed bow I backward sprang, and thoughts
Toned down long time, came quickly crowding up,
Till madden'd by them I was desperate.
Sir Oscar Vivian was then, it seem'd,
Evermore lost to me, and by my fault,
My aunt had said; yet wherefore? He might know
By his own heart, I had not willingly,
In mere caprice departed; he had heard
Surely the cause! and could he wish, or hope
That I had acted otherwise: why then
Should he feel piqued or slighted? I was free
To act as I might choose; no word to bind
Or hold me to himself, had e'er been said;
I was untrammell'd still. But had he said,

Said in straightforward, earnest, honest, words—
"Mildred, I love you! be my wife!" what woe
Had then been spared us: I had gladly sprung
To his great heart and never, never-more,
Could all the world, and all its bitterness,
And all its malice, sickness, sorrow, woe,
Have forced me from him; only would my heart
Beat more in sympathy; grow fonder, higher,
In all things needed by his own; but now—
I could not cheat myself, I was beloved
By him no more; nay,—then a bitter thought,
More cruel still than any other, pierced
Like iron through my heart—perhaps, oh shame!
Perhaps he ne'er had loved me; it might be,
Only my vanity had fancied it;
He all the time, but loving then, as now,
Beautiful Ida; she was lovelier far,
More stately, richer, higher far than I;
And he was only cheating time with me,
Or piquing Ida for her haughtiness.
And once indulged this thought gain'd wondrous pow'r
Till it absorb'd all others: all day long
I brooded over it, e'en while I strove
To do my daily work, the meanest work,

As carefully as any serving-maid
Born but to drudge could do. And by degrees
It stronger grew, and stronger, even though
Forced down so deep within, it show'd its marks
Upon my wasted frame, and pinch'd, pale face;
And people talk'd, and said I soon should be
With my dead father. Ah! and evermore
Came Ida's glorious face, insulting in
Its radiant love, between me and all things
I gazed around on. Even when I closed
Day-wearied eyes it smiled upon my sleep
With triumph, or with pitying insolence,
Till I was madden'd into agony,
That ate my heart away. And thus I wrote—
"Out! I do heartily despise myself
For this supineness; many a time I said
I could do thus much. Let me nerve myself
To pluck this plant up, though its roots be twined
Deep in my heart's strong fibres; let them bleed,
And quiver as they will, and agonise
In rending: I will pluck it up, and wrench
Away the tendrils that caressingly
Climbed up aloft, by stronger plants to gaze
On moon, and stars; and drink the light of heaven.

Yes! I will do the deed! and holding it,
This fair-grown plant, uprooted in my hand,
Hurl it afar; ah! and close up the gap
Where it did grow, and if it still will bleed
I'll sere the wound, and hide it too; and none
Shall point the uplifted finger of cold scorn
Towards it; and henceforth I'll smile, and go
About my work as heretofore, and none
Shall ever guess what bloody work my will
Did in my own poor heart, that I might save
Myself and it from a consuming fire;
A dread disease; though 'neath the pain
Of the great antidote it break or die—
And yet 'twas very fair, this plant of love;
The tangled blooms, and luscious fruit hung low
About the portals of my heart, and cool,
Delicious shades were 'neath it, and wild gleams
Of blinding joylight, where it fell between
The umbrageous foliage. What a quiv'ring gleam
Of something—was it light, or shade?—did play
Around, and o'er it! what a wild'ring charm—
Was it a melody or jargon?—thrill'd
Amid its leaves and tendrils! Let me think!
If I could spare it, I would let it still

Grow on untouch'd. 'Tis fair yet! very fair!
Might it not flourish yet awhile alone
Of its own self? and keep its beauty still?
Or would it pine, and fade away, and die,
Lacking the sun, that drew it from the soil
High upward, till it grew a glorious plant,
Drinking the golden floodlight, and it ran
Throughout its being, in life-giving streams,
Yielding it all its rich, deep colouring.
No! no! no! no! it could not live on thus:
First, it would draw out all the nourishment
My heart could give; and then it soon would die;
And all its rotting stalks, and leaves, would lie
And cumber up what now is neatly kept.
And so it needs must be that I uplift
Myself to tear it down. Well! why not now?
For it is written, "He who hesitates
Is lost for ever." Pride! thou'rt very strong!
But thou dost fail me now. I never yet
Have call'd on thee in vain before, yet now,
In this my greatest need I stand alone
Betray'd by even thee. So let it be!
Let me to work! nor let me boast myself,
Nor think that I alone of all my sex

Have done as much. Why! thousand thousands walk
In life's most humble ways with quiet tread,
And placid smile, who calmly laid aside
Their all of joy, and taking up their toil,
Went on uncheer'd, unheeded of, unknown,
Down, through the shady glooms with none to say,
Perchance, "God speed thee!"
Weeks pass'd while I was nursing thus my grief,
And then came the awakening. One day
My mother fell down swooning: horrified
I bore her with our pupils' aid away,
And laid her on her bed; and then, when life
Was, for the time, away, I first beheld,
With eyes awake to it, the havoc made
In her slight form by grief, and poverty,
And rigid self-denial: her sweet face,
Which always strove to smile on me, was drawn,
And seam'd with lines of care; and the soft cheeks,
Fall'n in and hollow; while the smooth locks seem'd
Far whiter than I knew. Ah! bitter pang
Of self-reproach that darted through me then!
Oh! agony, I suffered while I chafed,
With untired energy, the thin, worn hands;
Oh! horrors of remorse! as time went on,

Lest she should live no more! Thank God! that
pass'd;
She woke at last, the sweet soul came again,
And in my list'ning ear her faint words fell
Tenderly reassuring. True, still true,
I thought, to her self-abnegation; still
Her first awaking thought for me, alas!
So selfish and unworthy. It was well
This added care—my mother's failing health—
Came thus to draw me out of my own self,
And selfishness of sorrow; even time,
That deadener of grief, brought not to me
A lessening of mine; because that pride
Lay wounded in my heart, and there was found
No balm, no medicine, to soothe and cure;
No skill'd physician to bind up, and heal.
Bitterly to my heart I cried out thus—
"Have I not learn'd that men may woo like this
And win the pure fresh love of virgin hearts?
And when they weary, flit like summer bees,
To other flowers and fairer; so that they
Bound not themselves by words; for looks, mind you!
Weigh light in scales of justice!" Then pain'd pride
Took me full captive, till a flood of love

Came welling over all my heart, and faith,
Trust in his truth—however clouded now—
Possess'd me. Yet, I question'd, why not come?
And ask, and know my reasons for my flight?
He is a man untrammell'd by the chain
Of pride, and weakness, woman's hind'ring bonds.
And so I wept, and thought myself forgot,
And Ida's radiant face, all love-embalm'd,
And lit with those star-eyes, would pass between
My work and me, and blind me into nought:
Then humbled, wondering, and weak, I went
Wearily on my round of duties, done
Unlovingly and sternly. Quench'd and cold,
All poetry seem'd press'd from out my life;
For never written stanza, or bright thought
Lighted my brain, or gladden'd my crush'd heart:
Never a whisper stirr'd my slumb'ring mind,
Nor thrill'd glad answer back from fancy's voice.
Cold, cold and dim, and echoless, and void,
The dreary depths of poetry's late home:
Her rainbow-fillet loosen'd, once again,
Through tear-blurr'd eyes I saw the outstretch'd view,
And found it harsh, and stern. Reality
Stripp'd off disguise, and stood reveal'd in garb

The poorest, and the meanest; sweet romance
Held shamed-faced back, and in the garish day
Paled into weak, and faded tints; then stole
Gently away, and in the distance stood
A shadowy vapour, melting in the glare
Of unaccustom'd light. Our pastor grew
So feeble with the early days of spring,
That now we rarely saw him: from afar
A distant relative, his heir, had come
To cheer his ling'ring life. Once more I saw
The dear old man. 'Twas on a dreary day
In early April, when they bade me go
To take my last farewell of him. Cold show'rs
And pelting hail drench'd bursting leaves, and brake
The budding blossoms from the shiv'ring spray;
The primrose blooms were draggled on the earth;
The violets crush'd and crumpled; daffodils'
Bright golden crowns were mire-bespatter'd; trees
Stripp'd of their green and silver shoots;
And all their harbour'd nestlings dash'd below
To perish wretchedly. The rector sat
In his arm-chair; his delicate, pure face
Etherealised, and beaming with a look
Like Raphael's saints wear; all his snowy hair

Wreathing, and waving round it like a crown :
His eyes, clear, blue and innocent as a babe's.
I knelt and kiss'd his hand, and took the seat
Assigned long time to me—low at his feet.
Tenderly then, with his small trembling hands,
He smoothed, and put aside my hair, and gazed
Inquiringly upon my tearful face.
"Dear child!" he said, and wherefore are you sad?
Whence is the trouble that is pressing so
On your young heart? So near, so near the goal!
And standing on the utmost verge of earth;
I seem to look out with a clearer view
Upon its tides and passions; and I mourn
To read, dear child, as now I read, your heart.
Is not God gracious ever? Why hold back,
With this stern pride, from His embracing arms?
Why think yourself a victim to His wrath?
When you must see He waiteth, with pierced hands,
And bleeding heart, and drops of agony,
And tears, and groans to show you all His love.
Does He take pleasure in the chastening
He needs must give to draw you to Himself?
Ah, child! dear child! I yearn, here as I stand
Upon earth's brink, to see you yield yourself

Up to His teaching, who will deal with you
For ever as His child." I bow'd my head,
And wept the tears that ease a breaking heart;
Then, calm'd and lighten'd, looking up, I saw
The sad, slow drops down trickling from his eyes;
Those tears of age so terrible to see,
Calm, cold, and passionless, reflecting back
Nor earthly hope, nor brightness. "Child!" he said,
"Old age is weak; my manhood had been shamed,
In years gone by, by tear-drops such as these;
But age is weak, I say, and youth is strong;
And you, why, you are strong to go and come,
To climb and toil, long yet upon the earth:
Despise not youth and strength; despise not life;
Nor rail against the bright and glorious earth;
All God's gifts must be good; and His the gifts
Of life and light; of strength, and youth, and all.
Come, rouse thee, Mildred! life was never given
To frown and fret away in peevish sloth.
Youth is not given to waste in idle dreams
Of what might be, or should have been, did all
Work as we wish, in life's machinery:
Leave this for weaker natures; you, I say,
Have strength; arise and use it! Pardon now!

If I probe hurtfully the wound, I fain
Would turn towards quick healing. Love-sick dreams
Are not for you; weak fancies, such as these,
Come from sheer idleness, in hours unused.
You have fair field before; foes ahead
To fight, and battle with, and conquer too;
Why not arise, and smite them? Love comes once,
I know, to woman's heart, for life or death;
For happiness, or misery: heaven, or hell;
As each one to herself shall take it; as
Each to herself shall use it, or abuse.
Love, like all passions, takes its colouring,
Is force, its power, from character and soul
Of her it harbours in;—is master, slave,
Tyrant, or servant, as it finds the power,
Little or much allow'd it. Not all gone,
The brightness of the heavens; the joys of earth;
The wine of life; the fervour of glad youth;
Though love be lost: not utterly bereft
Of light and warmth, the heart of such an one,
Believe me, Mildred! There is work, and work
Such as weak hands as yours are yet can do.
Weary not heaven with lifting tear-dimm'd eyes,
And nerveless, sickly, vapid prayers, for what,

If granted, may be worthless. Morbid views
Of God's great purposes, and childish hopes
Self-centred; sentimental, silly dreams,
Encouraged unto sinfulness: of these
Beware! Oh folly! weakly to upbraid
The great God-Father, if in His wise love
He veil from sunshine, sometimes, the weak eyes
That dazed by cloudless splendour were smote blind;
But shielded gather strength. Oh folly too!
To murmur that the glow of light and love
Warms sometimes other homes, and hearts than ours,
And leaves ours cold awhile!" I bow'd me low
And wept again the tears that ease and calm;
And—well! no matter what beside transpired:
Enough! I left him, after he had pray'd,
And kiss'd, and bless'd me: left him, as I left
Once years before—that dear revered old man—
With added strength; with deeper, purer hopes!
With heaven-upheld resolves, and clearer views
Of life, and life's long labour; and no more
Did I behold his face! He wand'reth now
Amid the mystery of all mysteries,
A meek and glad beholder: God's great love
Bright'ning in visible effulgence round

His glorified humanity. Blest be
His ne'er-forgotten memory !—I arose
To full and active life again, and strength
Came back ; and once again our home was bright
With cheerfulness ; my ready step grew light,
And song, unbidden to my lips would spring
With its long-past glad harmony. At last
The poet's precious gift came back again
To me, unworthy ; but it came with pain,
As light comes back to eyes long tightly closed
Against its brightness ; so I wrote and sang,
And felt that as I did so something new
Was added to my poems ; was it not
The added power our pastor had desired ;
The tone and strength that length of suffering
Had taught me? 'Twas the sweetness which the grape
Yields to due pressure ; fragrance which the herb
Gives out when crush'd ; it was the melody
The harp makes when the wind mysteriously
Sweeps harshly o'er its strings ; it was the heart's
Uprendering of its treasures, when its depths
Were tempest-stirr'd and ravaged. Like a tide
Restrain'd beyond its time, this gift flow'd back
And deluged my whole being, till I rose

And fell with it, and felt myself a straw
Whirl'd here and there, obeying all the time
Some mighty guide, to whom I needs must yield.
And out of this grew rapidly and well
A poem, whose first fragments many a year
Had floated through my brain, scarce wotted o f,
And yet someway become a very part
And portion of my being. Finish'd now,
E'en to the latest line, cold blankness fell
Upon my weary spirit; the bent bow
Sprang back, and lay unstrung; the weight removed,
The numb'd brain lack'd its balance, and forgot
Its poise and equilibrium. Quick disgust,
Loathing to an intensity, possess'd
My feelings for the work so lately loved,
And work'd at with such fervour. Only came
A little satisfaction when I met
My mother's proud, glad look, as, holding up
The finished book, she gazed through misty tears,
And smiled her warm approval, bless'd me. This—
This was my best reward; praise, blame, may come,
But nothing could embitter this one pure
And genuine reward. Then follow'd need,
Hard pressing poverty, that like a clod

Weigh'd down the wings of fancy, plumed for flight,
And, crush'd amid the meanest things, we strove
To wring therefrom "the meat that perisheth;"
And yet—oh, mystery!—the immortal soul
Needs—ah! and lives by—lacking it, must burst
Forth from the shrunken body. We were poor;
And, oh, the weary cross of penury,
Even when borne in view, and friendly hands
Hold half the burden! but, when press'd within,
Hidden away, it eats into the flesh,
Wounding and bruising, till upon the heart
Its impress cankering sinks. And yet what toil
Can frail, weak woman do, when nurtured up
In gentleness and luxury; it may be
With timid nature shrinking from rough gaze,
And dreading public notice! Can she go
Unaided and alone into the world,
And hew out thence, amid its rocky plains,
An untrod way; when but the weary march
Doth pale her lip, and bow her frame, and steal
The beauty heaven has given her for her dower?
How can she go amid the crowded ways,
And, jostled by rough boors, wring out from earth
Life's bare necessities—her daily bread?

How shall she go unaided up the steeps,
And storm the jealous-guarded fort of fame?
A woman rarely is a woman when
She hath pursued that path; she must have crush'd
Out of her being all that made her once
Essentially a woman; must have dwarf'd
All the sweet modesty that made her shrink
From wishing even to be known of far
Out in the noisy world: the nameless grace,
The veiling softness, which about her clings,
Like moss around the rose, bloom on the peach,
Scent round the flower: all the calm content
That made her morn and eve bend low and own
Heaven very bountiful: all reverence which
Did make her yield to him she call'd her lord
And—let me write it—master. Yet, ah! there
The key-stone is which holdeth up the whole.
She hath no lord; and 'tis from stunted love
That woman takes to thirst for fiery fame.
What gentle heart that rests itself secure
Upon a stronger, giving all its love
Without one earthly reservation, feels
This burning thirst for fame? None! none!
'Tis only when that love has all been given

In vain! in vain! that, like a lava-tide,
This raging thirst bursts in upon the soul,
And bids it seek assuaging. Only when
The heart hath been crush'd low, it poureth out
Its dregs of worship at the shrine of fame;
And mad ambition weakens with a power
Never to be enfeebled. Pity them—
These tender hearts that never thought to start
Upon so hard a way! and if they fail,
Speak very gently of them; 'twas so hard,
That upward climbing to the slender feet;
And if they reach the fane, then yield to them
Your meed of praise ungrudgingly.
But never think that laurel crowns can cast
Such glowing radiance o'er their brows, as would—
It may be long ago,—the bridal wreath;
And never think their hearts are satisfied;
And never think them hard and obdurate;
They shudder coldly on their silent hearths—
That should have each a master—and they list
In vain, for all the babble of sweet words
Small baby-mouths could make; and, desolate,
They pine and droop without the holy love
Which makes of woman all that she should be.

And this in spite of all that some would say
About the bliss of "single blessedness:"
In spite of all they say of giving up
Heart, soul, and strength of purpose, health and life,
To holy deeds, to nurse and tend the sick;
Instruct the young; have pity on the poor;
And raise the sad and sinful. All this done—
Done earnestly and well, yet something's left
Unsatisfied, for nature will assert
Her rights, and yearningly the heart uplifts
Its unhush'd cry for love; true, human love;
For woman here, is woman; at the worst
Still woman, not a fiend, though hell-claim'd;
Not angel, at her best, though heaven-own'd;
But woman, woman still, for aye! and aye!
The same as her great mother, Eve the fair.

XII.

LADY! we battled with our poverty
For many weary months, till pinch'd and pale,
And worn and weary; then my spirit rose.
"I'll turn the gifts God gave me into use,
These failing, then for labour with my hands."
Will'd well is half fulfill'd, and eagerly
I went to work and sent my poems up
To one I knew in town; entreating him
To guide me with his wisdom. Quickly came
This gen'rous answer back. "I like them well!
There's strength and truth in them; these must prevail;
I do your bidding, wait awhile and see
What comes of my best efforts." Later yet
Again he wrote—"A publisher is found,
But you are wanted here;—up with you, then!
And trust me, as your much-loved father's friend,
For standing by you alway." Here was news!
And bounty too, for knowing need press'd hard,

This gen'rous soul provided all the means
For present use. The struggle though was sore,
Ere all the host of woman's cares and fears,
Were vanquish'd or appeased, and I could dare
What *seem'd* so much, what *was* indeed, so small.
I left my mother with a village maid
To aid and care for her, and with her tears
Yet glistening on my hair, her kisses warm
Yet glowing on my lips, the start was made
For my long journey. Boots not here to tell
The long details of all that went to make
My busy life up there. Book, work, and friends,
Acquaintances—all had their claims on me;
Wearied with all in turns, with all again
Well-pleased and happy, thus the time sped on;
From days to weeks; from circling week to week,
Till four swift months had sped. Then, lo! one day
The book, *my* book, lay in my trembling hand,
Finish'd and launch'd; that day I sent it down
To my loved mother, with a hurried line
To say I soon should follow it. They said
My book was a success; I cared no more,
But bade adieu to brilliant London then,
And all kind, gentle friends, and hasten'd home,

Eager once more to reach it. It was eve
In June's fair month. I gain'd our humble cot
With—pity my poor weakness!—step of pride,
For I had won a triumph. Nevermore
Should want, or penury bow down the heart
Of her I loved so dearly. I would now
Surround her with the luxuries, that use
Of years had render'd necessary; she
Should sit in ease and dignity, while I
Would write, and work, and, when aweary, turn
To her for renovation. So thought I;
And even as I did so, raised the latch
And pass'd the wicket-gate, then to the door,
Which opening wide I enter'd; all was still:
No sounds, save of my hurried footfalls, broke
The strange, cold stillness; something seem'd to fall
Like ice upon my senses; springing up
The narrow stair, I reach'd my mother's room;
There sat the village maiden weeping loud
Beside my mother's bed, and—she lay dead!
Dead, lady! dead! with yet my little book
Clench'd in her stiffen'd hand; she died, they said,
Some few brief hours before. Why should I here
Strive to depict my agony? I knelt,

And stroked her hair, and murmur'd piteously,
"My mother! O my mother! speak to me!
I am alone, dear mother! take your child,
I cannot live alone!" Blaming myself,
Condemning my long absence; hating all
That dragg'd me from her first; I turn'd to stone,
Under this anguish, then fell weak and low
Beneath the pressing burden. Days went by
While I lay low in sickness, all too weak
To raise a nerveless hand, or breath a word;
With eyes that loathed the very light of day,
And ears to which the very voice of birds
Was ringing discord: sad and sick and faint
My soul cleaved to the earth. Yet presently
Went forth the mandate, "Let her live!" and life
Came gently, fitfully, and faintly in
Like a weak tide; and throughout all those days
I look'd not to the sky, it seem'd too far,
Too high, for my poor weary eyes to lift
Themselves up to; but lowly on the earth
I bent my gaze, and from the humble herb
And flower—nay! even from the crystal drops
That morn and eve hung pendent from the green
Grass blades, and bent them into graceful curves—

I learn'd wise things, and haply them received
More meekly, gladly, than a sterner task
From voices counted grander, fraught with truths
Deduced from science; proved, too, ay! so plain
The veriest dullard must acknowledge them
As truths past quibble. "Milk," 'tis said, "for babes;"
And so my feeble spirit lay and drain'd
From mother Nature's tender breast, the food
Most suited to its nourishment and life;—
Lay with closed eyes, and drew fresh strength and hope
In with the gentle stream. Oh, wise men, laugh!
You, who in great, full strength, look up and crave
Strong meats and drinks to feed the brawny growth
Of brain, as bone and muscle; you, who glean
Sustenance from the things your daring hands
Tear down from heaven. Oh, ye wise! ye strong!
Smile if you will that my pale soul laid low
Took feebly in the new-born babe's first food.
The autumn came, and found me wandering
A pale and shadowy outline of myself,
Once more around the bound'ries of that house
Which was no more a home. My sable robes,
And white, thin face gain'd pity from the few
Who cross'd my path; and little village maids

Would raise their rosy faces in hush'd awe
To gaze far after me with tender eye.
My aunt, I heard, had just return'd, and begg'd
I would not linger where the memories
Were sad and harrowing, but come forthwith
And join her in her mansion; she, her lord,
And all her friends would welcome me; and if
I long'd for quiet, there were yet my rooms
Where I could write and study. "Why not come,"
She added, "and inhabit them at once?"
I warm'd to her, for she was now indeed
The only one of my own kin to yield
Counsel and aid and comfort, and withal
I loved her still. For one brief moment rose,
Amid the languor of my grief, the dream
Of ease, and rest, and luxury, that thus
Were mine for but the taking: no more toil,
Save as I cared to do it; no more strife
With penury and want; no carking cares
For everyday necessity; no coarse
And vulgar duties thrust upon my sight,
And burdening my weary hands to do;
No more contending for a place and name;
Once 'neath my aunt's protection all must yield

To wealth and title, interest and power.
And I might be—ah! what might I not be?
In but brief time. But then, oh suddenly!
Her failing us in time of bitter need;
Her cold, harsh words; her blame of lost ones; all
Came up and fired my blood. "No! no! not yet!"
I cried with brimming eyes: "not yet can I
Go there and ask her sympathy once held,
With almost harshness, back from those whose lips
Now mute and cold can never ask it more."
Thus I stay'd on amid my native haunts
And made a little rural home, where art
In unity with nature lovingly
Entwined, and wreathed it round, and everywhere
The eye fell pleased and cheer'd. I rose up too
As flowers bow'd down before the flood arise,
When sunshine comes again; I rose and took
My portion of the life my God had given
And strove to nourish it; and presently
I almost loathed myself to find that I
Could smile, and care to look upon the sun,
And see soft beauty once more in the brook,
And in the trees and flowers; even for hours
Forgetting too my sorrow; dreaming dreams;

Toying with busy fancies.. Then I wept
To think, while yet the grass was scarcely green
Upon their graves, I could indulge a smile,
Or for an hour forget them. Yet 'twas false
This morbid sorrowing; weak sentiment;
For does not nature teach us evermore
In her continual changefulness, that nought
Can, in this world, exempt itself from change?
For a time only can the bow'd heart bear
The burden of its misery; from within,
More than without, come hintings afterwards
That's ease by change, or death must be: and life
Springs to the struggle eagerly, and throws
The crushing burden off, or slips it back
Gradually to the earth again; or death—
If that life's efforts fail—creeps silently
And steals the crush'd heart out
From its dull weight, and soothes into sleep.
All wants, all deeds, all cries, die slowly out;
All woes, all hates, all miseries: ah, more!
All happiness, all love! What then? mourn we!
Mourn as with nature piteously, and long,
Robed in dark sable, crown'd with willow-sprays;
Tear-dimm'd, and ash-strewn; mourn awhile; but rise,

Rise and rejoice with nature; for spring comes
Back o'er the frozen pool, and plucks up flowers,
And incenses the meads, and drapes the woods,
Bright as though never frost and snow had nipp'd
And pinch'd up last year's beauty. Life and joy,
Back to the renovated heart! and take
Abode and dwelling there—not grudgingly,
But gladly yielded therefore!
'Twas late again in autumn; leaves lay thick
Upon the outspread earth, and white and fair
Two crosses rose before the two green graves,
Where as the sun sunk low I loved to go
And deck, and wreathe with flowers; not murmuring,
Nor weeping bitterly, but gently now,
Such tears as bring relief, and drain out all
The dregs of bitterness; and peace was mine.
It was our village feast. Since early dawn
The sounds of merriment and busy hum
Of that glad crowd had floated up to me
In my still peaceful home, midway set down
Between the hill and vale: and now 'twas eve;
One of those quiet evenings when the earth
Seems standing still to watch the dying day
Do battle with dark night, and when her last,

Low, quivering sigh goes forth, and she lies low
On the far hills, the crimson tide of life
Outstreaming over them; the hoary earth,
Weeps childish tears, to see the latest born
Of Time die thus. The din and noise below
Had well-nigh ceased, and sweetly on the air
The rich-toned bells rang out half-jubilant,
Half-mournful; like this life, this wondrous life,
We needs must bear till death! I sat alone;
The distance of my room now lost in gloom;
The shadows of the waving trees and shrubs
Flick'ring fantastically on the floor;
The scent of late-blown roses, mignonette,
And wall-flowers, wafted through the open door,
Which led out to the lawn; the moon just risen,
Round, red, and full, behind the trees, pour'd in,
Just where I sat, a flood of dazzling light,
Rippling o'er all the vines above my head,
And with long silver fingers touch'd the leaves
Of one slight, graceful aspen, shivering,
And whispering, close by: no other sounds
Save these disturb'd my reverie. How long
I may have sat on thus I cannot tell;
My thoughts were of the past; when suddenly

The outline of a man stood out distinct
Between me and the moonlight on the lawn.
And—yes,—'twas *he!*—"O, Oscar!" and I sprang
With wild, quick steps to meet him. There we stood,
Hand clasp'd in hand; heart beating time to heart;
The silver moonlight rippling over us,
And all the tender jangle of the bells
Swelling, and dying, floating up to us,
Seeming our joy's accompaniment; and all,
All save ourselves forgotten. "Mildred Gower!"
He said at length, and very clear and grave
The loved tones fell—"there's much to tell, and hear.
Where shall we speak together?" Turning round,
I laid my hand in his, and in we went;
And there amid the moonlight, with the chimes
Still wafted up at intervals, he learn'd,
Mid broken sobs and tears, the history
Of my life since we parted. He nor spoke,
Nor varied once his posture—turn'd from me—
Till it was ended; then he came and stood
Close up beside me, bent him down and look'd,
As in old days, deep, deep into my eyes:
Then did his firm lip quiver, and his face
Work with contending feelings; and his eyes

Flash'd now in lambent flame, now melted down
To wondrous tenderness: his voice was low,
And forced, and hollow, when at last he spoke—
"Mildred! O Mildred! we have been deceived,
Belied, and slander'd. Pardon, pardon me!
Sweet suff'ring saint! Oh, that I heeded them,
The wicked slanderers! and in my pride,
My miserable, mean pride! forbore to seek
The truth from holier lips! What shall I say?
How shall I tell it?" Here he paused; I lock'd
My cold hands rigidly, and call'd for strength,
Then bade him tell me all. 'Twas briefly this:
Sir Reginald had left soon after me,
And, in revenge for my rejecting him,
Reported by his friends that we had flown
Together, and were married. My fair aunt
Had gone upon her tour; no one was left
Who could or would deny this. "You may guess,
But cannot tell," he added, "what I felt,
To hear this of the one I deem'd so pure;
The one—oh, bear with me awhile!—the one
I own I loved. 'Twas then that recklessly,
And half to save my pride, before my friends,
That I—but why go over it again,

Mildred!—I work'd and battled with my heart,
Till, thinking all my love for you subdued,
Nay! dead for ever,—pity me! Forgive!
Yet shall I nevermore forgive myself—
I, in my fancied triumph, gave my hand
And name to Ida Leslie: she's my wife,
And I have vow'd to cherish her, and she
Is happy in her lot; content with what
Of love I have to give. O mockery,
To call it love! I never loved but one,
That one thyself, lost Mildred! lost to me—
I know it now—by my own selfish pride.
For in our sorrow we grow wondrous wise;
And plain I see you loved me; tell me now,
Ere yet we part for ever, it was so."
I did not shriek, or sob, or shed one tear;
But fainter grew the pulses at my wrists,
And fainter grew the throbbing at my heart;
And life seem'd ebbing low, while death was far
As it had ever been: I felt like stone,
Failing, too, perfectly to comprehend
Or fathom half my woe. I only rose,
And standing up before him, raised my eyes
And rested them on his; and hoarsely fell

On my own ears my voice, as quietly
I told him thus: "You're right! I loved you then
Better than God; but He's a jealous God,
And would not have it so; I nevermore
Shall love another; you have had my love—
My first, my last, my all! Now, go! Your wife
Stands up between us—Go!" I could no more,
My head sank on my bosom, and my arms
Fell nerveless, and I stagger'd. With a cry,
As if death-stricken, Oscar Vivian sprang,
And held me to his heart, and mad, wild words
Of burning love he utter'd; but a space,
A brief, sun-dazzled space, for then there came
Remembrance o'er my senses, and I rush'd
Into full strength, and burst away, and stood
Ice-cold and calm without; while he, he fell,
Broken and heart-crush'd, writhing on the couch,
A strong man in a strong man's agony.
And I, for whom there was no comforter,
No light, no hope that moment,—I who yearn'd—
With oh, how much of longing!—dared not touch
With one small finger-tip that broken man,
Nor breathe one word of comfort, lest I sin,
Or add to torment that I dared not ease.

I could but look on trembling; never prayer,
Though striven for wildly, could I breathe in words.
Mutely my heart bled for him! mutely fled
My spirit unto his, and echoed back
All that he strove to bear. He calm'd at length,
His passion's tide forced back, and, mastering
With iron will his feelings, thus he spoke:
"O Mildred! you are right! I forfeited
The power that should have been a sacred right
To shield and to protect you. Never now—
I feel it as the bitterest of my pangs—
Can I stand up between life's ills and you.
That little head must bow beneath grief's weight,
And I not raise it; that dear, fragile form
Must bend, and fall perchance, while I, whose heart
Should have been thy true shield, must stand afar,
And seeing, dare not aid; those tender feet,
How will they tread the hard and slipp'ry ways?
Yet when they trip or stumble; bleed or burn,
I may not hold thee up with my strong arm.
Those slender hands! how will they put aside
The stumbling-blocks, and briars. That sweet face!
Ah, love! I shudder when I think that thou
Hast no protector in this wide, hard world.

Oh! I could bear all other ills than this;
Could bear to see thee e'en another's wife.
Bear it? Ay! I *would* bear it, did he prize
But to the full thy worth, and shelter thee,
So that no frown, no slander, no harsh ills,
That man could shield thee from, should injure thee.
Ah! I could bless and honour him, and smile,
And leave thee here and go. But now,—O love!
For let me call thee so awhile, nor shrink;
Love such as mine the angels pitying see,
Nor turn from with a blush!—but now
Who will there be to guard thee, Mildred, sweet!
While I afar am watching o'er my wife?"
I found a voice, and words, and answer'd him:—
"Who shields the eaglet in its upward flight?
'Mid lightning shafts and thunders. Who points out
Her path in heaven to the defenceless dove?
Who notes each sparrow falling to the ground?
And clothes the lily in its loveliness?
Who tempers to the lamb the piercing wind?
And shows the panting hart the water-brooks?
Oh, never doubt for me! I do not doubt!
But is this well? oh! is this well at last,
This blinding revelation?—all too late!

Are we not mad? or wicked to stand thus?
You, all another's by the solemn vow
Given and received 'fore God. Why did you come?
Now all too late! too late! for hope, or joy,
Or glad, bright rapture; nay! for calm content,
That shadow'd forecast of a happiness
Possible in the future! It were best,
Since all is lost, never to stand reveal'd
Each to the other thus: refinement of—
Forgive me!—parting's agony, to see
In this one blinding flash what might have been,
What has been, and what is. Go! It were best
To have been left in ignorance; for time
Might then have heal'd the wounds: forgetfulness
Have hidden them from memory, as moss
Veils jagged rock-rents. Go! My very soul
Is struggling and rebelling. Leave me now!"
Then he—"And think you not I suffer? God!
Thou only knowest how much! Yet I say
It were not best to have been left in doubt,
Not knowing. Truth is truth; and love is love;
And light is light; and should and shall reveal
Unto the utmost, all things. Best to know
E'en to the full the *has been* and the *is*,

Though it bring torments to the sever'd hearts;
Though it bring death to happiness. Far best
To know the truth, than ever beat about
On vague suspicion's restless waves, nor find
Rest in conviction ever. You and I,
We know now all; and even in this hour—
Supreme in joy, supreme in agony—
Nor you, nor I—O Mildred!—would, in truth,
Wish other to have been to-day than this
Last meeting with its revelation made.
I go! You bid me!—Honour calls away—
But, trust me, Mildred! this can cast no stain
In heaven's light on your lily-purity.
Unto God's angels I could answer give
For that, as in this moment, too, for mine."
"Ay, so!" I answered, with a ray of peace
Piercing the woe-veil round us, "Heaven is kind.
Yes! God is very pitiful, and life
Short at the most; and I, upheld of Him,
May slip along unnoticed through the shade
And shelter of its green and silent lanes;
Far, far away from all the rush, and noise,
Of its highways; and sometimes I shall stop
Within those verdant lanes, and, putting back

The prickly hedge-rows, peep between, and gaze
On flowery meads kept green by bubbling streams;
And little dells within whose depths of shade
Sleep mimic pools, wreath'd o'er with lotus-flowers,
And fringed with ferns and mosses; perfumes, too,
Will sometimes scent the air I breathe; and sounds
Of harmony float by; and God's best sun
Will warm me sometimes; and within the night
His moon and stars will look low down on me.
And I shall go on calmly—not at first,
But presently—so calm, and thankfully,
Down, down, still leaving far and farther off
This one brief, blinding, gleam of happiness.
Yes! I *must* think this fiery noon will pass
With all its agony of light and sun;
And presently the creeping shades will come
And lay their coolness on me, as upon
The fever'd forehead cool, soft fingers press.
And then the twilight-deep'ning dews will fall;
And quench, perchance, this fever in my heart,
And I may be at peace." "God's benison!"
He whisper'd, solemnly: "God's eternal peace
Rest on thee, Mildred—ay! and so it will!
As surely as light comes to morning skies.

And now farewell! throughout all life we two
Shall meet perchance no more. Now heart from heart
We needs must wrench away; but soul from soul
Never! no, never! God, be Thou our guide
To happiness hereafter! Fare-thee-well!"
And ere I well had heard him, he was gone!
And out beyond, the shadows deepening
O'erspread the moonlight; and I, shudd'ring, turn'd
All chill, and cold, and drew the curtains close,
And down they fell between me and the *past.*

XIII.

O LADY! do you know how in some dreams
You lie half-conscious that it is a dream,
Yet cannot break the spell that binds you low
To horrors all unutterable? Just so,
For many days and nights, I lay,
Obliged despite myself to cease awhile
From even living; for this was not life,
But dull existence. Wearily the days
Went, dragging by their burden of long hours;
Then followed nights of blackness, like to that
Which brooded in proud Pharaoh's palace-home;
Blackness that might be felt, felt deep within
The inmost soul; cold, creeping, horror-full;
Palpable to the spirit which did crouch
And shrink from it, as one who in the dark
Doth stretch his hands and grasp an icy corpse.
I gather'd strength e'en then, as flowers do

When they lie dead to view in winter frosts—
Strength to arise, as soon I did, and take
This war of life up where I laid it down,
And wrestle, struggle, faint sometimes, and fail,
On, on, on, to the end :—
The end? When will that come, O Lady? when?
My soul doth wake sometimes, and piteously
Cry out in yearning earnestness for *home.*
The end? Sometimes when gloom doth compass me,
My soul doth clamour for more light, more light!
And listens eagerly for trembling tones,
Still flutt'ring, sever'd from full-measured chords,
Heard once amid heaven's "harpers with their harps;"
And rustles, softly rustles all her plumes,
And stands, as 'twere, on tip-toe, to depart.

* * * *

Once more the simple daily tasks began,
The old, well-trodden round; and healthy life,
Young, strong, and vigorous, flowed back, and swept
Through its old channels. Grief gave way; but sat,
Crown'd with dank weeds and draggled flowers; with robes
Drench'd and woe-dabbled, sobbing helplessly;
Sat on the sodden-bank, and, to the sound

Of sweet, health-giving waters, wail'd, low-toned,
A sad accompaniment; wrung her weak hands,
And beat her breast, and ate her heart away,
And pined, and paled, and faded, dying not,
But waning to a wraith. Books, work, and pen
Were gradually resumed. Distasteful toil
First it appeared, but afterwards they took
Their wonted hold on intellect and heart;
And out of these there grew a tiny germ
Of what was sweet content. But, Lady, dear!
This could not come unsought: how earnestly
I strove for it, with prayers and bitterness,
None save myself can tell; nor yet how long
It was in coming; only, one bright night,
When silver bells were ringing out the year,
I knew my woe was buried in the past,
And vow'd these chimes should be its funeral knell;
And as the glad peals from the dawning year
Came floating up the clear, sharp, frosty air,
A strange, soft calm fell on my glowing heart,
A calm which comes of passions well subdued;
And down they sank, like weeds beneath a stream,
And I had won back life—full, healthful life.

* * * *

'Twas far in "leafy June;" the silent air
Was full of luscious sweets, and wearily
Throughout the day I earnestly had work'd,
Till pulses quicken'd at the burning wrists,
And either temple beat so heavily,
That when day deepen'd, down I threw my pen,
And saunter'd out to let the freshen'd air
Press out with kisses cool the fever-pain
That ran with fiery current through my brain.
Onward through narrow bowery lanes I went,
That wound, like dried-up rivulets, deep down
Within the rich, bright meads; now crossing here,
And there diverging; winding in and out
Throughout the outspread country. High above,
In the full hedgerow, blossom'd many flowers
In wreath and cluster; while, high up again,
Whisper'd and bow'd the slender, shapely trees;
And here and there, by rustic stile or gate,
Was just a peep of the in-rolling sea,
But some few meadows off; and every breeze
Brought its sweet music to the list'ning ear,
Droning earth's lullaby. A while, and then
I found myself within an avenue
Of limes and chestnuts: mighty trees were they,

With tow'ring branches, monstrous trunks, and roots
That wound and twisted, like close-knotted snakes
Pain-tortured, round my footsteps; overhead
The boughs met close, and made a gentle gloom
A constant twilight, even in mid-day,
Through which sometimes a golden arrow sped
Straight from the sun, and, darting through the trees,
Would shiver into atoms on the ground,
Striking out emerald fire-flies from the grass,
And splash the trunks, and drabble the bright leaves,
And then die out. Or, when the evening lay
Faint on earth's lap, the sorrowing sun would look
Into deep dingles and dark woods for her;
Sending his errant beams far up the glades
To light her home, if so she linger'd there.
Oh, how the wild birds chanted their glad lays,
Their vesper hymns, that eve! Oh, how the bees
Fill'd up the undertone of harmony,
Revelling in sweets about the blown lime-flowers
High up in leafy arches! Then uprose
A gentle wind, and blew abroad perfume;
Whole showers fell down on me; and far below,
In the green avenue, a golden mist
Crept some few paces up;—for quickly now

The sun was sinking—something moved in it,
Moved in the golden floodlight. Why uprose
My heart with clamorous cry? Why shrank I back—
Far back into the gloom—and interposed
A giant tree between me and those shades
So gently creeping onward? Instinct turns
The dumb brute from the fire; and wherefore ask
Why turns the heart from shade of coming ill?
'Twas—can you guess, dear Lady?—it was *he*,
Sir Oscar, and upon his arm there hung,
In all her stately beauty, who but she,
His wife, the lovely Ida? Up they pass'd,
And I, unseen, could see how cold and set
Her chisell'd profile show'd; how clearly white
Her high arch'd forehead rose; how proudly firm
Her passionless and perfectly cut mouth;
How wondrously her great and glorious eyes
Shone from her dark, Madonna-like smooth'd hair.
She had not pal'd nor faded; she had gain'd,
Nor lost from off her beauty e'en its bloom.
No trace of struggle round the firm, cold mouth,
In cruel lines; no wrinkles on the brow
Betray'd mean, carking cares; no furrow plough'd
Deep 'twixt the eyes by thought's keen, cleaving share;

No trembling of the eyelash; no quick flush
Hinted of hopes and fears; placidity
Unruffled kept its court there; hope fulfill'd;
And fear—if fear had been—whelm'd into peace.
While I—but let that be! And *he*, my love!—
Mine once, hers now: yes, hers by plighted troth
And wedded right.—And he? Oh, he was changed!
Yet it were difficult to say in what.
A something less of sweetness round the mouth;
A something more of sadness in the eye;
And just a shade of lines upon the face,
Spoke of a heart not perfectly at rest.
They pass'd me close, and what it was—who knows?—
But something, as he near'd me, made him start,
And almost drop the hand he held, and quick
The dark flush mounted to his brow, and he
Look'd eagerly around: the shade veil'd me,
And they pass'd slowly on, a dewy light
Just dawn'd, then died again, within his eyes,
Such as I oft had seen there. Had the scent
All blown abroad from these fair linden flowers
Brought back to him a memory of the past?
An evening such as this, when we alone
Had wander'd too 'neath limes, and he had dragg'd

The bending branches down, and pluck'd the flowers
To please me! Did he know I treasured them,
And wore them on my heart till I had found
Him wedded to another? Well, they pass'd
Up through the arching aisles, she all so cold,
And he so memory-haunted; mid the light
I lost them. My way lay back through the gloom;
And God forgive me! if some bitterness,
From the deep fountains of my heart, well'd up,
And poison'd for a tiny space sweet life.
I saw them after that a year or so;
Both much the same; she might be just a shade
More icy cold, and he some shades more stern.
They had no child, and he, so people said,
Deplored no heir was born to him to take
The fair inheritance he own'd, to pass,
Therefore,—when he should steal away in death--
Unto some distant branch of kindred, known
Scarcely by name to him. A sorrow this
His high ambition brook'd not. While for her,
Poor Ida! she yearn'd silently for one,
Just one, sweet babe, to nestle to her breast,
And call her mother. Oh! who knows how then
Your ice, I thought, would thaw to baby-lips;

Your heart would break up into gushing founts
Of warm, pure love, could little baby-hands
Press softly round it; all your marble face
Would glow and breathe to life could baby-eyes
Rain yearning tears upon it; your proud neck
Would bend low down in sweet humility,
Could rosy, chubby, baby-arms twine round
Its stately pillar'd beauty; at your wrists,
So cool and even now, the pulse would beat
To throbbing ecstasy, could you uplift,
From his small toddling feet, your own sweet babe,
To hold him in your arms, and close his mouth
With tender mother's kisses. Who shall say
God's gifts are all uneven? He doth deck
The poor with weeds, but yielding wondrous sweets;
And for the rich He makes to bloom the rose;
But, lo! 'tis studded thick with piercing thorns.
Who says they are uneven? He doth set
Some feet to tread mid rocks and burning sands;
But hand-in-hand with them are kindred souls
Whose love makes bloom the desert as a bower.
Who says they are uneven? In rich vales
Others may wander; but beneath the flowers
Lurk poisonous vapours. Leave such things to God!

"His ways are not our ways." He stands above
Our mole-hill world, and turns the tide of time;
Its ebb and flow, its spring and neap; and all
Move to the perfect rules of harmony which He
Hath set to guide the universe for aye.
Do we dare raise our tiny plans, and pout,
Like children o'er their toys, because, forsooth!
We find them break sometimes, or will not act?
Oh, madness! to oppose our wills to God's!
He who might snap them as the mighty arm
Doth snap the bow; He who might crush us down
As atoms in the dust! Oh, happy soul,
Who learns that perfect peace and happiness
Above is his who lays his will and God's
Close side by side, in parallels! We make
Our cross ourselves when laying our own will
Athwart our God's and then we take it up,
And murmur at its burden.

I wrote again, dear Lady—wrote again;
But not as heretofore. In early youth
My rhymes were all white-draped, and colourless
As spring's first snowdrops; later, sentiment
Just tinged them faintly; then a dawning love,
That grew up to maturity uncheck'd,

Gave greater depth and warmth ; then discipline,
Much chastening from heaven, added tone ;
Then agony, and wrestling spirit-throes,
In which I thought I conquer'd, gave me strength ;
And now this last, from which I simply learn'd
Humility, had given me lowliness.
And so I wrote, but with another spring
And motive for my writing, and it gain'd
And won upon far readers, till I knew
I had carved out for my own self a name,
And round about it, through, and 'neath it twined,
In graceful curve and delicate design,
That which the world gives slowly—thanks and praise;
And bruited it abroad. Ah ! long ago
I shrank from notice and publicity,
But now I cared not if the world rang out
From pole to pole with nothing but my name,
Or if no human tongue e'er uttered it.
" Miss Gower ! " one day a babbling visitor
Began, while chatting idly, " do you know,
While staying at the ' Woodlands,' some weeks since,
I met a certain Lady Vivian,
A wonderfully stately dame was she,
With great deep lustrous eyes, that somehow, though,

Wearied me with their one unvarying look
Of fix'd, cold, shining. Such a haughty brow!
But oh! dear me! no ice is half so cold!
I pity her poor husband. Mercy me!
She should be proud of him: he is so tall,
And handsome! Quite a nobly-moulded man.
But very sad and thoughtful. True, they say,
She was not his first love, nor yet he hers,
But that they wed in pique: howe'er this be,
I know there seem'd no love between the two,
Though he, I must say, was most careful in
His watchfulness for all her comfort, which
She scarcely noticed, or received it all
Just like an image would. Dear me! I quite
Forget what 'twas I meant to say. Oh, yes!
'Twas about you. What do you think? he had
Your last sweet volume in his hand one day,
And I began—excuse me, dear!—to speak
In praise of you; asking him, did he like
Your style of writing. Well, my dear, I wish
You had been there to see and hear him then!
His face lit up as I ne'er thought it could,
And I declare he sketch'd your character
As if he knew *you* rather than your books.

He said—dear me!—so much, I can't repeat
The half of it, but one thing I recall;
He said you stood as high amid the crowd
Of modern poets, as in your sweet self
You stood amid all other womankind,
As model for them; and at that uprose
The Lady Ida, with an angry flush,
And with a mocking bow and 'Thank you, sir!'
She rustled past, and swept out of the room:
I felt quite frightened, but Sir Oscar rose,
Inclined his head to her with courteous ease,
And open'd wide the door to let her pass
As gently as could be; then came and sat
And talk'd again of you. 'Twas then I said
I knew you, and he ask'd, quite eagerly,
A dozen questions: were you well: at ease
In circumstances and in mind? If true
What people said that you had won rich love,
And would be married soon? I told him no!
'And what is more,' said I, 'it seems to me
Our poetess is vow'd to live and die
In single blessedness.' 'So best!' said he.
'There are few men fit mates for her: fit guides
To one like her. Ill-mated she were lost

To love, to life, or fame; for such as she
Give no half-love; reserve no interest,
No hope, no end, or aim apart from that,
Life's great, one casting die—that failing, then
All fails. Ah! love is terrible to such!'
And then he murmur'd low beneath his breath,
'God bless her!' Do you know, I thought it strange,
But then he writes himself, and so perhaps
You poets know by sympathy what each
Finds burdensome in life. But, bless my heart!
You don't look well, Miss Gower! I have talk'd
And chatted on, and made your poor head ache;
Well! I will go, good-bye! Do promise me
You will come down and see me. I shall call
And have another chat soon; *au revoir!*"
Made my "head ache," dear madam?—no, my *heart!*
How glad I am you're gone! Never again
May I behold your face. What shall I do?
Give orders straightway to my waiting-maid
Never to let this babbler come again?
She's hateful! odious!—nay! 'tis I am weak.
Cannot I bear the chatter once awhile
Of one poor brainless woman? Oh! how keen
The nerves are still to every passing thrill!

What can it matter if he reads my books,
And likes them, or if not? I do not write
For him as once I did; but for the world.
What do I care for what he thinks? He may
Condemn, or laud: *that* cannot make or mar
My fame or future now. I stand above,—
Above all that. Above? Yes, that is it!
I stand alone, and there is all my youth,
Falling and dying from me, as the flowers,
The spring and summer blossoms, from the earth;
And I shall stand alone in autumn-time,
And in chill winter too, without one friend—
True friend or love—to guide and comfort me.
Ah, evil prophecy! What spirit stands
And moves my lips to utter it? For now
Would I recall the words: for, it is given
Unto few souls to roam the world alone,
In mist and gloom and sadness: even then
It is their hand alone, that carves the way
Their footsteps wend; they are not forced to it,
As dumb brute beasts to labour: they may take
What course they will. There is no destiny
But as we make it, each one, to himself.
We give heaven credit for too much: we ask

With prayers and tears, the gift of it we crave,
Nor *wait* for the reply, but go our ways
To gain our ends: we rush and trample down
All bound'ry-lines, and in our mad, blind haste,
We take *unbidden*, what we *ask'd* to have;
And then our passion o'er, and finding it
Not quite what we desire, we droop our eyes,
And meekly clasp our hands, and humbly say,
"It is a cross God-given, and we must needs
Bear it as such." Out, on such mockery!
It is not given of God! but it is stolen;
And 'tis in proof thereof we find it bad;
For all God's gifts are good. He would, unask'd,
Ne'er give His children weeds for flowers; nor husks
For fruit; nor evil passions for the good.
But when, like passionate children, we uplift
Our piercing voices, and our eager hands,
And importune, and, as it were, assail
The Highest with our claims—what then if He,
In very punishment, allow our hands
To grasp the prize! What can we say if we
Find it doth sting, or wound us, as we clasp
And drag it to us? We can force our fate
It seems, like this! What right, what right have we,

To tax our merciful and loving God
With giving us to bear the mortal woes
Our own dark passions breed? 'Tis shame to hear
Such woes call'd crosses: they are plain effects
Following on causes, laws for which were made
Coeval with us. If we dare them, then
Let us at least be honest, owning that
'Tis punishment rush'd into, and incurr'd
With open eyes—not whine and cant, and weep,
And say it is "God's will!" 'Tis not God's will
That any one should suffer, but by sin;
And that must needs bring suffering and death.

XIV.

LADY! you came again in sorest need:
Came with the mellow'd tenderness which years
Had sunn'd into your love! And very sweet,—
Ah! who can tell how sweet!—it was to lean
My hot and throbbing head upon your breast,
And feel it cool'd and rested? Once again,
Your wandering all over, you pursued
Your search for me, and found me; and again,
We two renew'd our friendship. You one day,
When half-confessing something you had heard
Of my great grief, gazed tearfully, and said:
"How was it, dear, your poor heart did not break,
And die of grief, like others, in your woe?"
I gave no answer then, but wrote that night
One that I meant and felt: receive it here.
"You're wrong, dear friend! Hearts do not die of grief;
Do not break suddenly, as people think,

In this world every day. Grief unto most
Is but a hard'ning process. First there comes
The mighty shock which shivers all the heart;
And after that—why, after that it wakes,
And, gath'ring up what's left of life, beats on,
With every day a stronger, fuller beat;
With every day a more impervious wall
Of stony matter coating it. You've seen
How lava-tides do devastate fair earth,
Scorching and black'ning every tree and shrub;
Sweeping away the tender herb; the flames
Lapping with red-hot tongue the rivulet;
And over myrtle groves and vine-wreath'd bowers
Piling a heap of cinders. By-and-by
The red flames all die out: from crater's mouth
The lava flows no more; and presently
Its rills and streams subside, cool down, and lie
A shiny, glitt'ring surface everywhere.
You see the simile? We women are
Often strange compounds of great opposites.
A wise rule this! A rule most merciful!
For where a weakness is assail'd and yields,
Its twin-born opposite quick rushes in
To help at sorest need. We love, we doat,

We thrill with joy at but a glance or tone
Of the beloved one: we are slighted, spurn'd,
Deserted for, perhaps, a fairer one,
A richer, or more youthful. We do lie
Prone in our weakness moaning; we should die;
But to our rescue pride comes rushing in,
And in its strength we cower no more in dust,
But rise up more than women—heroines—
To act a part sketch'd for us by our guide:—
Our one friend now:—till we forget ourselves,
Our well-known selves, and from the play we act
In all its parts, do shape us other selves,
And wear them as new garments, easily,
When once they lose their stiffness; and we go
With added dignity, may-be, calm, grave;
And friends congratulate us that we show
So well in our misfortunes, piercing not
What was at first a domino to hide,
But later, our whole garb; nor guess
At all the truth. Some few perhaps there are
Whom sympathy makes wiser; but the world
Will take, and value us as we do rank
And place ourselves; it has no time to stop
To tear disguises off. No! my good friend,

Hearts do not break so often as you think;
That is if you mean breaking unto death.
Grief kills, but seldom suddenly; it eats,
And gnaws and saps out life sometimes long years
Before the work is done; but then life beats
In such hearts never vig'rously: at best
'Tis but a feeble thrill; a sickly flame:
A pulse that flutters only, never throbs;
Such life were weakly e'en in happiness;
Were pale and colourless, as shaded flower,
Even in full noon-joy; were cool and chill
As sea anemones 'neath tropic heat.
What wonder such should sicken out and die
Under great griefs? Best so perhaps! What good
To live on like a snake crush'd under foot
At noon, to writhe all through the glare and heat
Of scorching, stifling day, till sunset hours
Bring death and rest? Or, like the sever'd worm
Wait, in dumb agony, till time shall bring
The parted ends and heal them into one;
To one again? Ah, yes; but seam'd and scarr'd
And twisted into knotted, hideous forms,
Mark'd by disdainful eyes; or, bitt'rer still,
Contemptuous pity. Were not death a boon

Rather than this?—death soon, death utterly?
Ask of Woe's millions, they will answer 'yes!'"
Smoothly my life flow'd on a little space.
With you for guest; the gentle, pleasant round
Of every-day and uneventful hours
Was grateful unto fever'd heart and brain,
And brought strange peace and healing.
Your wondrous tales of foreign life gave scope
For all your cultured converse; and to me
Open'd a new world for my eager thoughts
To rush speed-wing'd amidst. Again you left,
To tend your dying nephew, and once more
Turmoils' barr'd waves swept inward. It was thus:—
I was alone one evening, pacing slow
The shelter'd pathways of my garden through,
And pond'ring o'er some talk the eve before
I listen'd to indignant, from the lips
Of clever men and wise; and thinking there
My thoughts soon shaped themselves, and sitting down
Within a rustic bower, I wrote them thus—
"Philosopher! astronomer! divine!
Professor! sage! and leech! I laugh at you!
Not one of you can tell me what is life,
And yet you coldly write and speak of love—

The very fount whence flows the lesser life—
Like masters of the secret; worse than that,
You take your rounds and angles, lines and curves;
And draw set bounds for it, and try to trace
Its patterns in like tessellated floors!
Why not map earth? where light, where shade shall fall;
Place bound'ries for the perfume of sweet flowers;
Lop back the trailing, climbing vines that grace
The tangled greenwood, to stiff, cold, hard, lines;
Cut all the forest trees to pretty shapes
Of peacock, eagle, cockatoo, or ape;
Shred up the Andes, level down the Alps;
Stop up Vesuvius; scoop the Caspian dry.
Prune, lop, and polish up the lumb'ring earth?
Giant and gnome would fail in that you say.
Exactly so! And men and angels fail
To quench and stifle love, or give it forms
Foreign and strange to it; in spite of this
You turn to us, weak women, bidding us
Nor love, nor like, nor have a preference,
'Till at the proper moment, that is when
Some eligible man shall ask our love.
Ah! know you not the heart of woman turns
As surely unto love as flower to sun?

She needs must love; it is her embassy,
As much as 'tis the stars' to shine on us.
But then, alas! our weak hearts lead us on
Where your cool heads hold back. But you—
You men—you boast, 'You read us like a book!'
So much the bear knows of the butterfly;
He first strikes down, and then to understand
Shreds into tiny atoms; or the child
Rending his martial drum to see whence comes
The sound, finds out; both lost for evermore
By analysing coarsely. Is she wise
Who feels no love till she is ask'd for it?
Yes! she is wondrous wise! but, like King James,
So vastly wise she shows to us a fool:
For how shall she, when ask'd for, give of that
Which she hath nothing of? Is love, think you,
Of mushroom growth alway, that it should spring
Fair with its full-grown beauty, to the first,
Out-calling for its treasures? Underneath
The bosom of the earth the roots twine deep
And do their work in silence, till the breath
Of spring first wakens leaves, and then the flowers,
To gladden waiting eyes. Were it not well
To seek the vi'let where the perfume floats,

Rather than grope, not knowing? Then you say
We have no right—ought never to expect
Our love to be return'd. What? know you not
That love begetteth love; that heart to heart
Speaks as doth lip to lip; that eye to eye
Thrills a far surer language than the tongue
Lispeth by dint of learning painfully.
What, then, say you, becomes of her who loves,
And loves, alas! in vain? What shall she do?
What? Battle! struggle! wrestle! trample it!
If needs must be pluck out her very heart
And stamp it mercifully under foot.
Ay! stand above it, like a giant there,
And beat out life, till mangled, cold and stiff,
It lieth dead! And is it vanquish'd then?
Or will it, like the blood of Abel, call
Some day aloud for vengeance? Who shall say?
But is love lost though it be given in vain?
Is there aught lost in nature—from the filth
Which, percolating through the earth, returns
To us in crystal streams; or fallen leaf
Which, trodden under ground, next blooms a rose;
Up to the laughing sunbeams random shot
Into some reeking bog, and blazing forth

In crackling laughter on our hearths, may be
Some thousand years thereafter? Is it lost,
The dew which falleth on the barren rock?
Whence then the moss and lichens? whence the fount
Which bubbles up and murmurs at its feet?
Is there one lost of all the winged seeds
Whirl'd by the wind so madly? lighting down—
It may be in rich soil, may be on stone—
It germinates, or dies, and filleth up
In either case a need. Decay itself
Cannot be called a waste, since furnishing
Food in its turn for life. Nay! nothing here
Is lost for evermore, or wasted e'en,
Else where the refuse-heap of nature? where
The shreds and atoms useless? Then if nought
In great material nature ever fails
Of its given purpose, be that life or death;
Health unto vigour; sickness to decay;
Joy or dire woe?—if nothing can be lost,
Or wasted finally, why? tell me, sirs!
Why in the world *within* should it be so?
And first, as lord of all there, why should love,
Though to our eyes it fail, be ever lost?
Might it not be that only through that way

It shall attain the end 'twas destined for?"
Then hurried footsteps passing in the road
Close by, and agitated whispers caught
My half-distracted senses, "No, not dead!"
One said, "but nearly so: I go to fetch
The nearest doctor. 'Twas a fearful sight
To see her spring out shrieking." Near I drew,
And question'd what had happen'd; so I learn'd
A carriage had been run away with through
Our quiet village, whence a lady sprang
Frantic with terror, and fell heavily,
As if quite dead, and now lay helplessly
At the small village inn. "She's very high,
I guess," said the poor rustic; "for her men
Call her 'My lady'!" "Hurry on," I said,
"And fetch the doctor," and I hasten'd down
To see if humbler help meantime avail'd
This stranger lady. All the crowd made way
To let me pass: the mistress of the inn,
With fluttered senses, eagerly began
To tell me all. "The lady's on her way
To join her husband, ma'am! her coachman says,
Some long way off; and, a few miles back
The horses (new ones) took a sudden fright,

And rush'd on madly, till the lady got
Quite wild with terror, and sprang out and fell,
Striking her head; and now she lies, poor thing!
Like one death-struck." "Lead on!" I said, "I'll see,
Perhaps we can do something:" so we went.
A strange half-dawning fear of coming ill
Breaking upon my senses; undefined
Misgivings floated round about my heart,
And clouded out its peace. We hurried on,
Up the steep creaking stairs, and down a step,
And into such a chamber as one sees
Only in village inns: so clean, so sweet,
With snow-white curtains round a snow-white bed,
And snow-white linen, fragrant with the sprigs
Of lavender strewn o'er them, in the press.
I pass'd on quickly, drew the curtains back,
And there—O lady!—lay like a mute corpse
The Lady Ida! Oh! the cry came up
From my full heart e'er I could stifle it.
Yes, there she lay in all her stately pride,
Proud yet, from lips to brow, though life had flown,
And all her ebon hair was drabbled o'er
With ruddy blood. We bathed her marble brow;
We chafed her icy hands; we fann'd her cheek;

And moisten'd her stiff lips; and presently
The heavy eyelids moved; her glorious eyes
Glow'd down upon us, but unconsciously.
And then the village doctor came, and talk'd
Most gravely, shook his head, and felt her pulse;
Gave orders; spoke big words; used Latin terms
That almost crush'd the landlady, and said
The lady must be tended carefully,
And—as I glean'd at last from his wise talk—
Her brain was someway injured, in the fall,
How much, he knew not yet. So I took up
My post as nurse beside her, doing what
His counsel urged and my own reason told.
Perhaps that was not much: but she, poor thing,
Lay never heeding; quite insensible
Alike to carefulness or cool neglect.
We posted off a messenger to tell
Sir Oscar, and to hurry him, and now
We hourly look'd for him; yet still the day
Pass'd by, and evening deepen'd into night;
And yet he came not; very anxiously
We watch'd and waited, knowing she must die.
She slumber'd heavily, with now and then
A flutt'ring sigh, or feeble choking sob.

The night hung dark, with threat'ning thunder-clouds
Piled low before the sky, and scarce a breath
Relieved the stifling heat. The household slept,
All save one weary watcher down below,
And I beside the death-bed, listening,
With eager ear, for steps that would not come,
However wish'd for. Midnight sounded loud
From the grey church-tower; but he did not come.
Her breathing grew more feeble, and the damps
Hung in thick beads upon her clammy brow,
And all her heavy hair stream'd dank and moist.
Deeper the shadows grew upon her face;
Tighter the rigid muscles round the mouth;
Stiffer the icy pressure of her hand:
And still I watch'd alone. The clock struck one.
Darker without; low thunder-peals roll'd on
Over the hill-tops; darker still within.
Still the low gasping breathing; still the quick
Low flutter of the pulse; still the dense gloom
From the o'erhanging clouds; still the sharp tick
Of the old clock downstairs, relentlessly
Beating the time for every ebbing throb
Of that poor failing heart. Another hour.
She sigh'd, and open'd wide her lovely eyes,

All conscious now, and pour'd their light on me.
Kneeling, I placed the cordial to her lips,
And bath'd her brow; then taking up my hand,
She kiss'd it, saying feebly: "Mildred Gower!
I know you now: I know too this is death,
And I must speak to you before I go.
Forgive me, Mildred! I have done you wrong!
Yet all unknowing, and, alas! I sinn'd
More 'gainst myself and husband far than you.
I married him in pique, with naught of love.
All that I had to give was given before
To one not worthy that—Sir Reginald.
I thought you *there* my rival; now I know—
For death clears all things, Mildred!—now I know
The secret of your love for him who is
My husband now, but should have been your own.
He never loved me, Mildred! Yet has he
Been good and faithful, gentle, too, to me.
He err'd, not knowing: he was dazzled too
By this my fatal beauty. Take him back!
When I am gone, poor Mildred! and forgive,
And think of me with kindness! He is far
Too good and noble-soul'd for one like me—
All trammell'd as I am with lower ties—

To love as he should be beloved: had I
Met him but earlier, who may say—but now
It matters little; I at last shall rest,
And all the weariness of life be o'er—
It matters little." Very faint and low
Her voice had grown, and here again it fail'd,
And life seem'd nearly over. There were sounds
Of opening doors below; the stairs creak'd loud
Beneath a footstep I knew all too well,
And Oscar Vivian and I grasp'd hands
Across his dying wife.

Lady, the morning dawn'd, and she was dead.
Through open'd lattice came the earliest ray
From the uprising sun, and fell as light
As angel's kiss upon her marble brow.
The clouds had spent themselves in showers, and now
The fragrance from a thousand flowers went up
Through myriad lustrous drops; and the cool air
Floated abroad, and tenderly bent down
The roses climbing round the window close,
And frolick'd with the sweetbriar, and unwound
The jasmine tendrils from the trellis'd porch;
Then softly enter'd in, and breathed its sweets,

Like tender memories, about our dead.
Our dead? say I, ah! why not? she is mine,
As much as e'en his now: but she belongs
To neither; for another, stronger yet,
Stronger than life, and—no! no! no! not love—
Hath taken her away. Our dead? Oh, vain!
To call her *ours* who hath escaped from us,
From life and all its sorrows, and its joys,
And flown—oh! whither?—leave we that to God!
And so the sun rose up, and we two knelt,
I and the man whom only I had loved,
And who had loved me in all holiness;
And there betwixt us rigid, cold, and stern,
His wife's corpse lay; and he was weeping there;
The sunbeams kiss'd her forehead, then stole on
And tinged with glory all his bow'd down head;
But me, I noted it—they left in shade.
We rose up then. His face was set, and pale,
And darker circles widen'd round his eyes;
We just touch'd hands, with half-averted glance,
Then through the morning mist I stole away;
And, lady! we have never met since then.
They bore her body to the yawning vault,
Where, with all pomp funereal, it was laid;

And then he went abroad to stay some time.
And—well, dear lady! there is little now
To tell you:—after that you came again,
And brought me here, and these last months have pass'd
More swiftly and more happily than I
Had ever thought time could float by with me.
And something like the peace which as a mist,
A golden mist of sunrise, circles you,
Has stolen o'er me, and in it all my heart,
My flutt'ring, troubled heart, has settled down
And floats along to its own melodies;
And waits, and looks towards the redd'ning east,
Where haply it may see its sun arise.
My tale is ended, lady!

XV.

BUT yester-eve I wrote, "My tale is done!"
Yet here again I sit and take my pen,
And gather up my thoughts, and wed to words,
Once more for your brief reading. Yester-night
Has intervened betwixt my tale and me,
And brought me that within its folded arms,
And left me that from off its flutter'd wings,
Should find place here. I slept; my spirit stray'd
Out into far-off space, with none to guide;
Nor knowing ways, nor means; yet with an aim,
And end, though dim, in view. I lighted down
On a vast plain, so boundless, that the eye
Wearied in piercing onwards; sterile, bare,
Of every growth; e'en grass, and weeds; stone-strewn,
With jagged rocks torn through the iron ground.
Cold, grey, and gloom, always enveloped it;
And stillness, never varied by a sound,
Brooded unbroken o'er it. As I pass'd

Wearily onward, driven by some power
Unseen, yet felt, black slimy snakes crept out,
And hiss'd around my footsteps ; undeterr'd
On yet I went, the plain but widen'd out
Farther as still I hurried, limitless ;
Backward and forward, all around it stretch'd,
In hideous desolation, mocking at
The pigmy steps, with weary, stumbling feet,
I sought to span it with. Worn out at last,
And sinking on the ground, I sobb'd and wept,
And, dropping down my head upon a stone,
Slept, sleeping dreamed a dream within a dream,
Of flowers and meads, of rivulet and fount ;
Of golden gates 'gainst which I beat bound wings,
Longing for full-speed freedom to rush through
And grasp the ruddy fruit, that, thick as dew,
Studded the emerald tree, which sway'd its boughs
To heavenly harmonies, between those bars,
Those bars so bright and golden. Then there came
One dress'd in white, and whisper'd, "Dost thou long,
Long sore and fondly, for the ruddy fruit?
It shall be thine ! Yet wait awhile and see ! "
And gliding up he smote upon the gates,
And lo ! amid hoarse thunder they were gone

And only prison bars: he breathed and, lo!
The emerald tree fell low, a writhing snake,
Its ruddy fruit but ashes. Then he turn'd
And smiling, bade me take my full: but I,
Shudd'ring, drew back, and sighing deeply, woke!
Woke only from my dream within a dream,
And found the plain around me as before,
Nor narrower, nor smoother, and arose
And sped me on, footsore, yet eagerly,
As knowing blindly there was a beyond.
Now, dimly fashion'd, 'gainst the low'ring sky,
Show'd a bare mountain peak. No power was mine,
Nor will, to diverge from it: painfully
Up to the foot I crept. Here larger rocks
Were scatter'd; larger serpents writhed and hiss'd;
And bat-wing'd creatures whirl'd on leaden-wings,
And glared cold stony eyes upon me. Up!
Up the steep mount that yet a semblance bore
Of trodden pathway, up with crumbling stones
Shatter'd beneath my weight, and loosen'd rocks
Bounding to depths beneath. A deeper gloom,
A colder air, my senses seem'd to freeze:
A weight press'd on me as of unseen hands
Dragging me ever backward: while sometimes

Peals of low laughter—laughter without mirth—
Fiendish, exultant, echoed somewhere near,
Then died away in distance. Cold and stiff,
With stumbling footsteps now I gain'd the top;
But a small space, a narrow peak, set round
With huge rent rocks in circle, leaving yet
One narrow entrance: here came unseen things
And thrust me in, low laughing. In the midst,
With the rent rocks around, sat, in grim state,
An old, old man: grey flutt'ring locks hung long,
And mingled with his flowing, tangled beard
Long-drooping to his waist. His massive brow
Was circled by a mighty iron crown:
His stony eyes were fix'd unflinchingly
Upon a volume open on his knees,
And firmly-grasp'd with either bony hand.
His dark robes fell around him, border'd with
Strange cabalistic characters; and bands,
Like garnish'd, girdled them. He never spoke
Nor raised his head, nor show'd by any sign
He guess'd my presence; trembling, there I stood,
A dwarf before him, high he tower'd above,
A giant, and a whisper told me he was Fate.
I shudder'd, called to him, he raised his head,

And one look of those stony eyes sent back
The life-blood curdled to my inmost heart.
"What wouldst thou, mortal? tell me"—hollow came,
As from deep caverns wind-soughs, his hoarse voice!
"I would know all,—all that the future holds,
Evil and good," I summon'd strength to say.
"Ay, so!" he mutter'd, "Come then here! Thy name?"
And, rustling o'er the time-stain'd leaves he, look'd
And beckon'd me. I near'd, and laughter peal'd
Again in devilish mirthlessness around;
And there were other sounds—soft sighs, low wails,
And rushing through the air of many wings,
And faint, sweet voices hymning. "Read!" said Fate,
Pointing to where the open'd page show'd close,
The scrawl'd, weird characters, on vellum traced,
And thickly strewn with margin notes. In vain!
I could not read! I wept, and meekly pray'd,
"Fate, read thy scroll to me!" He bow'd his head;
His breath was cold as ice upon my cheek;
His lips were moving, and I lent my ear
Eagerly for the secret, when there came
Rush of wings overhead; a flash of light;
A strain of music; then a spirit, wing'd
And robed in white, stood twixt us, veiling Fate

With outspread pinions, stood and drave me out
With tender hand, yet firm, and held me there
Outside the magic circle, speaking thus,
In silvery tones, and clear,—" O daring soul !
How durst thou venture here? and face thy Fate
Unshelter'd and unguided? Know me now !
I am thy guardian angel; powers of hell
Have risen against thee, thou couldst not repel.
They have been fought and conquer'd. Eagerly
Thou hast been seeking, yea ! had found, what known
Must have been thy dire curse; thy blinded eyes
Had closed death-stricken; thy poor trembling heart
Had fail'd and perish'd, could the scroll of fate
Have been unfurl'd to thee. Take warning ! Go !
Saved once, learn well the lesson. Day by day,
As time unfolds it, only canst thou learn
The work to do; the solving carefully
Of daily, hourly problems. Go ! Toil on
In life's great garden, sowing eagerly
The little seeds, nor heeding where nor when,
Nay, nor *by whom*, the golden grain is reap'd :
Heeding not unto what vast granaries,
Kept for world-feeding, it shall be call'd in;
Envying not, though another's store-house fills—

That other or thine enemy or friend!
Plant out, in seemly rows, the goodly trees;
Tend them, and nourish them; till, arch'd and high,
They screen the fierce heat, and the tempest shield,
From, it may be, thyself or others. Wait!
Wait in meek trust, till ruddy, luscious fruit
Drops to thy hand, or other's hand, dead ripe.
Channel for dews and rains, heaven-sent, safe beds,
And lead them through as rills and rivulets,
To eddy round, and feed the thirsty plants;
To swell the river-tide, and flood the swamp,
Turning it to a silver lake; to gush
Down through dry grasses, 'mid the osier-beds,
Over bare plains and scorch'd-up meadows. Go!
Do thou thy part in life: in doing lies
Life's solace and life's happiness; reward
Is not life's end and aim, but comes unsought,
Unthought of, when the wearied labourer
Most needs it." Fail'd the voice so silver-toned:
Faded the vision softly into space:
And up, and up the rifted clouds, hymn'd on,
Fainter and fainter, angel-voices thus—
"Do thou thy part in life! in doing lies
Life's solace and life's happiness; reward

Is not life's end and aim!" and died at last
Somewhere amid heaven's blue. I, starting, woke,
The room was full of sunlight, and a flash,
As of departing angels' wings, struck bright
Across my dazzled eyes; a gentle sound,
As of "farewell," sigh'd round me.

XVI.

I HAVE not waited long: a week has flown,
And here I bask in all the golden glow
Of the uprisen sun of happiness.
Stay, let me veil my eyes, and turn aside,
And shape my thoughts to words, and record it;
So shall it seem more real. Oh, do I live?
Or have I, through a new birth, enter'd in
Where sorrow never comes? Be still, O heart!
I would stand still, and strive to understand
The workings of this feeling; I would stand
With shielded eyes, and gaze, half-blinded, on
Up through the riven cloudland, whence pours down
This flood of joy-light on me. Vain, all vain!
I am as one who has aroused a god
From long-time slumber into active life,
Such as gods live: awe-struck, I but watch,
Adore, and laud his doings; for my love
Doth lord it over me, and act a part

All to myself unknown. It leads me here
And there a captive: makes me say and do
A thousand things I dream'd not of before:
Holds up a mirror, too, before my eyes;
And, through it glancing, I behold extend
The well-known landscape I have gazed upon
A hundred times before, all changed and grown
To loveliness unequall'd. People look
And move with grace and beauty newly given;
Colours glow brightly; even shadows fall
Tenderly soften'd; voices, tones, and notes,
Tuned into liquid harmonies, drop down,
Into mine ear as honey-dew in flowers.
My semblance in the mirror, too, has gain'd
A beauty like the others; but, stay here!
O! smoothly-flowing pen; I would but write
How all this happen'd. Yes, a week ago,
Just at the hour of twilight, I had stolen
Away to sing alone, as is my wont;
And, with the parting daylight floating in
Through the low-open'd windows, there I pour'd
My passing fancies out in many a song
That, years ago, one dearly loved had praised,
And listen'd to enraptured: till at last

Such tender mem'ries came, that, spite of me,
My voice gave way, and so the song died out
In a long shudd'ring sigh. A step came near
Out of the dim obscurity, and hands
Clasp'd mine, and tender greetings, and low tones
Were murmur'd in mine ear, and when I roused
My 'wilder'd senses and looked up, behold!
There stood the one I dream'd of as afar—
Sir Oscar Vivian. Hand in hand we stood;
One thought within our hearts; one pulse in time
Beating to joy's glad triumph; all the past:
Rolling away behind us as a mist;
The present glowing in all brilliant hues;
The future stretching out in cloudless light,
Nor paling in the distance, but all blent
Into one converged glory, like the sun
Takes to itself when setting. "Mildred, dear!"
At last he whisper'd: "Mildred! now at last
We may be happy! All the hopes and fears
That lit and clouded o'er our sky are gone;
And we two stand in full-blazed noon, and ne'er,
By God's help, will we part; for here I ask
Shall not the happy dream that long ago
We two did dream, be realised? Wilt thou—

O my beloved! place thy hand in mine,
And let me lead thee onward until death
As mine own wife?" Oh, was there any need
Of words for answer? To his heart my own
Leapt gladly: to his soul my own, joy-wing'd,
Cleaved never more to part! Life unto life,
And love—life's life—to love. And in the hush'd,
And passion-full sweet twilight but one sound
Rippled the silent air—a little bird
Singing its vespers on the vine without.
"Wrote I not heaven is pitiful?" I said.
"'Tis more! 'tis bounteous, lavish: here I stand
With thee to-night, and it doth shower on me
A thousandfold the blessings it did take
And garner up—not squander—for a time;
And I can prize them to the full, nor prove
Unmindful of the Giver; nor dim-eyed
As to the Source: but standing thus with thee—
Hand clasp'd in hand, I yet can look above
And see in faith Another loved still more;
Can stand with thee, beloved! Three times yet
Dearer that there is One beside more dear."
"O Mildred!" Oscar answer'd. "Joy doth work
In many ways on many hearts. With some

It turns the thoughts all earthwards, striking through
With its great dazzling light, and blinding swift
The dim-eyed worshippers, and so the Source
Of all things exquisite is overlook'd;
Then the dull heart doth haste to settle down,
As flies 'mid sweets, where sinking still it feasts,
And feasting sinks, till surfeited it dies.
Some, joy drives to delirium, and these
Rush madly through all follies, and abuse
That which doth make their joy, till it becomes
No more a joy, but sorrow: Bacchanals,
Who, mad with riot, trample down the grape,
With leaf and tendril; turning o'er the vine
Which yielded them the spirit of their feast.
But, thanks to God! there are who wisely take
Their gifts of joy, as violets take heaven's dew,
With heart and eyes turn'd upward; giving back
The precious incense of glad prayer and praise.
Look up, my love! up to the star-gemm'd sky,
And ask of God strength for thyself and me,
To bear this new found happiness aright.
What have I done that all this light should lave
My soul thus largely? Mildred! say what thoughts,
Sombre or glad, oppress thee? Thy hand thrills,

And in thine eyes a tender mist is spread,
Like that which rolls down mountains ere the rain
Falls in quick showers. Mildred! art thou sad?"
"Nay, all my soul dissolves in thankfulness!
I did but follow out your thoughts, and find
How widely different joy works in me.
It may seem strange, but true it is, I am
A better woman; nearer heaven; more quick
To deeds of charity and gentleness,
All christian graces, when in happiness,
Than when in grief. It seems as if my heart
Had drain'd the strength'ning cup of bitterness
Till it has lost its virtue; and at last
Another medicine of luscious sweets,
Diffused from joy is its best cordial.
For at this first brief sip my heart is loosed
From the cold ice-bands that did compass it,
And through it leaps the rich, life-giving tide,
With such glad haste that at my finger tips
I feel its quick'ning measure warmly beat."
My Oscar's eyes were humid as he said,
"Ah! sorrow hath perform'd her part so well
That she no more is needed; but must pass
With muffled tread, and yield her place to joy,

Who now must take the work up. First the seed
In the dark earth must lie in gloom, and bear
The pressure of the clod; the pelting rain;
The haunting of all creeping things of clay;
The taint of earth. The struggle for full life
Must begin *there;* but pushing upward, lo!
The sunlight kisses it; the dews of heaven;
The balmy air, all fan its little life,
And then the flower shall blossom, and the fruit
Ripen to fullest sweetness. Half its life,
But only half, and that the poorer half,
It taketh from the earth: its other half,
And that the highest, it must draw from heaven,
To which it stretcheth all itself, and looks
With its unwavering faith, through cloud and storm,
And bitter winds, to sunlight like to this;
Happiness that can never die, my love!
Its source is in the Eternal!"

Poems.

POEMS.

SLINFOLD PARK.

ONCE more! once more! after long years of pain,
After long absence fretted out in care,
I haste thy verdant hermitage to gain;
I come, thy grateful peacefulness to share.
Once more I tread the park and velvet lawn,
Where patriarchal trees their blessing shed
In cool delicious shade, from dawn till dawn;
Where nature perfected by art is led:

And stand, at length, bewilder'd in the glow
Of lovelight beaming from each eager face,
Then sink, enraptured, 'mid joy's rapid flow,
A welcomed guest in my accustom'd place.

Fleet time, elsewhere so obdurate and stern,
Hath here but soften'd down each harsher line,
Reveal'd fresh beauties ; warm'd the tints to burn
With richer depth; heighten'd e'en heaven's sunshine.

Scenes bright and fair have held me captive long ;
Hearth-circles dear have widen'd out for me ;
But none have woven round me links so strong
As these that draw me back again to thee :
Here wait full sympathy and tender love,
For which, so great the gifts, I can but pray
That all the choicest blessings from above
Will light you, friends, to heaven's unclouded day !

BELMOREDEAN.

HAVEN of rest, farewell ! A little while
Under your grateful shelter to repose,
And catch the sweet reflection of joy's smile,
Has been my lot ; but now there comes this close :
With tear-dimm'd eye I pierce the leafy screen
To gaze my last on thee, fair Belmoredean !

Where clearer skies seem ever bent above,
  Where brightest sunshine gilds the full noon-day;
Where clouds are spann'd by heaven's fair arc of love,
  And eve in royal purple steals away;
Where, fresh and free, the strength'ning breeze keeps green
The vig'rous life for heathful Belmoredean!

O waving groves! amid your kindly shade
  My fret of life died out in restful calm.
Oh! rich parterres! whose fragrant blossoms made
  For my worn spirit a delicious balm!
O towering hills afar! O meads between!
How can I part from lovely Belmoredean!

And you, my gen'rous friends! whose hearts and hands
  Were outstretch'd thence, to make me glad and blest;
Since fate our parting thus again commands,
  Still let me gently in your mem'ry rest:
And may your lives pass, happy and serene,
In no less lovely spot than charming Belmoredean!

MARIE ALEXANDROWNA.

(THE DUCHESS OF EDINBURGH.*)

THE pomp of the bridal; the priest, and the king;
The vows, heaven-recorded; the circling gold ring;
The prayers, and the chorals; the splendour and state,
Have brought thee, fair Princess! joy-sped to thy fate;
And nations have thunder'd aloud in glad pride
Their peans of praise to the Prince and his bride.

The air, perfume laden, roll'd onward flute-voiced
To the earth's utmost bounds, till they heard and rejoiced;
And the glad spring awoke with a smile and caress,
Kneeling down at thy feet, open-handed, to bless;
And we pray'd with the peoples low-bending—"May life
Bring its richest of gifts to our Prince and his wife!"

* Inserted in *The Bristol Times*, March 13, 1874.

We have given thee glad greeting; our island rings out,
From its vales to its hill-tops, joy's answering shout:
With right-royal festal, with triumph and song,
Proudly England has led Russia's daughter along:
Now sweeter and warmer, impulsive, upstarts
Love's greeting—"Fair Marie! come home to our
hearts!"

THE ASHANTEE VICTORS.*

THEY are a noble band!
Warriors that fought upon Afric's shore
For the glory and fame of their native land,
With the fearless heart and the strong right hand
That cowards fly before.

When they crush'd the tyrant, then
They blotted out the vile disgrace
Which the bloody slaughters of that foul den—
Sick'ning the hearts of our stoutest men—
Cast on the human race.

* Inserted in *The Ladies' Own Journal*, April 11, 1874.

They have done the deed, and well!
And justice points, calm, stern, and dire,
To the battlefield where the base foe fell;
To the reeking ruins of that earth-hell,
But purified by fire.

What now shall England do?
"Ye are victors! heroes! every one!"
Hear the welcoming shout! and the triumph-lay!
See! our tears of pride on your wreaths of bay!
Take the guerdon! nobly won.

Take the guerdon!—England's best—
From England's Queen and from England's heart—
Glowing thanks and praise; on each manly breast
Let the medal gleam, that shall tell the rest
How ye nobly did your part.

UNWIN BROTHERS, THE GRESHAM PRESS, CHILWORTH AND LONDON.